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Margoun, the Strange;

OR,

Gilbert Grayling's Young Wife.

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CHAPTER I.

THE ADRIATIC IN A STORM.

"Do you think you can get in, captain? This is a terrific gale, and the snow is blinding!"

The broad-shouldered, brawny-armed skipper did not reply at once. He clutched the railing of the "bridge" and glanced closely and keenly around him, while the great steamer plunged madly ahead through the seething billows, that were running mountain high, and which, almost every moment, were breaking over the ship, from stem to stern.

The view—if it could be called such—was far from being a pleasing or encouraging one.

The night was inky black; the curtained heavens looked like a mighty funeral pall gradually settling down upon the face of the storm-racked ocean; the wild waves lashed the air, and the winter gale piped shrilly through the rigging of the struggling craft.

To add to all this, a terrible snow-storm was raging; for it was a night in September.

The red lights, swinging in the rigging near the bridge, flashed over a few persons who stood there at the peril of their lives. Those persons were the skipper, his first mate, and the quartermaster; while to the right, stood the man who had propounded the query, and to which no answer had as yet been given. Just behind him, silent, tall, grim, and motionless in the darkness, was another man who steadied himself by gripping one of the creaking iron guy-stays which supported the huge funnel.

Now and then, under the breath of the tempest, the light flared in the face of the skipper.

It chanced to do so, just as the question had fallen upon his ears. The captain's countenance was stern, uneasy, half-defiant, but, withal, foreboding.

At last, after his scouting of the surroundings was finished, he gave vent to a low ejaculation, struck the snow and frozen spray from his beard, and said:

"I shall do my best to that end, Mr. Manton."

This was a laconic reply, and an earnest one; but it had not answered the question.

The man addressed as Mr. Manton shrugged his shoulders. He was about to speak again; but the skipper, turning to the brawny seaman who, trumpet in hand, stood nearest him, to the left, said rather abruptly:

"Take half the watch, Mr. Jackson, and lay out on the fore-castle. Be ready with the lead. We are close on soundings—infernally close!—I know it."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the mate dragging his sou'-wester over his eyes, and belting his oil-



SHE WOULD HAVE FALLEN TO THE FLOOR HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR CLARA DEAN.

skin weather coat around him, left the bridge and clambered down to the slushy, sleety deck. He soon disappeared, going forward. A moment later, above the storm, the boatswain's whistle was heard piping the watch to quarters.

"You are made of stern stuff, Mr. Manton, to face this gale, such a snorter as this!" said the captain admiringly, his eyes resting on the manly form that towered by his side. "I have followed the sea from before-the-mast to the quarter-deck, but by old Neptune, I have never run athwart more wicked weather than this! And—whew! look out, sir! Swing on! for here comes a comber! By old Nep—"

At that moment a huge wave struck the steamer, bows-on, swept relentlessly onward, and flung its spray over the deserted quarter-deck, two hundred feet astern.

Those hardy fellows whose business required them to be on deck, and those equally hardy ones who, on the bridge, braved the weather, were drenched through and through, and struck and bruised by flying pieces of jagged ice which had been torn from the ship's bows and hurled aft with terrific force.

But the vengeful billow had done no harm. The skipper shook himself like a great water-dog, clutched the wire railing afresh, and turned again to his companion.

"By old Neptune, but you *are* gritty, Mr. Manton!" he ejaculated, watching the young man, who, at that moment of danger, stood as quiet and unmoved as if the scene was to him one of everyday experience. "Aren't you afraid, sir?—afraid of the—"

"Afraid!" interrupted the other, almost with a hiss. "I am afraid of nothing, of no one, save indeed the God who made me!" and he pointed reverently into the darkness above. "I laugh at danger; and I bid defiance even to this maddened gale! Oh, captain, there are wilder storms, that we are called upon to breast, than these elemental tempests."

His words died away in a sullen mutter, and what he was saying was borne off upon the windy gusts that swept over the deep.

The skipper heard some of those strange words; though he wondered at them, he said nothing. He only remembered that Thorle Manton had been an inscrutable mystery throughout this tempestuous voyage of the swift-keeled Adriatic; that he and his dusky-faced Hindoo servant, Margoun, had been enigmas past solution, not only to himself, but to the rest of the few saloon passengers who had braved this wintry trip across the stormy Atlantic.

After a brief silence the captain broke forth: "Well, all I can say, Mr. Manton, is just this: *This* isn't a storm to be laughed at. Whew! listen at that! But did you ever run afoul of one that was as rough as this?"

"Oftentimes."

"By old Neptune—where?"

"In the Indian Ocean, many and many a time," was the quiet reply.

"Ah? You have traveled, Mr. Manton!" and the skipper, forgetting for the time the surrounding danger, gazed at the dim form of his passenger, almost in amazement. "Yes, you must have traveled, sir!"

"Slightly; and Margoun, too," pointing to the tall man behind him, who clutched the iron guy, "has, like myself, seen many blows even more diabolical than this. Yes, captain; and we—"

He laughed loud and bitterly.

Captain Stone wondered.

"And—what, Mr. Manton?" he queried, impelled to ask the question.

"Why, we laughed at *them*, too!"

All this time the Adriatic was battling with the gale, and nobly contending with the Titanic billows which rushed upon her. But despite her powerful engines the steamer's progress was slow. In fact, the blasts of wind were so violent at times that she was absolutely blown from her course, and drifted away almost helplessly. But, as the fierce bursts would lose their strength, the gallant craft plunged on her onward way again.

"By old Neptune!" growled the skipper in an undertone. "Indian Ocean, or no Indian Ocean, this gale is a smart handful for anybody! Say, Lowndes," and he turned to the quartermaster, who stood silent and watchful by his side, "send four extra men to the wheel, with orders to keep her head up to the wind! Away! and back with you at once!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the man hurried away.

"This confounded gale is freshening every moment!" continued the skipper, flinging a glance at the murky heavens.

"That's my opinion, captain," Manton said, as he quietly drew near the other. "But, do

you think there is any danger—danger to vessel or passengers?"

His words were grave in tone; but they did not betray the least fear.

The veteran seaman pondered again, while, almost angrily, he flung a glance around him.

"N—o," at length he falteringly replied. "That is, so long as the old Adriatic holds together, and behaves herself as she should. But, Mr. Manton, to tell the truth—"

"Yes, captain," calmly urged the young man, seeing the skipper hesitate.

"Why, sir," and the old man's voice was hard and stern, "no pilot-boats seem to be about. Our signals, which have been displayed for more than two hours, have not been answered. Without a pilot, I cannot—because I dare not—run in. Then, too, I am uneasy about my bearings. If I can only get a glimpse of the Sandy Hook light I might push in, come to anchor and ride out the gale. But in this confounded snow-storm you can't see a ship's-length! Besides that—"

He hesitated again and glanced toward young Manton.

The latter seemed not to notice the old sailor's pause.

"Where *are* the pilot-boats, captain?" he asked, anxiously.

"Lord bless you, sir!—far away from these waters, I fear! They have either stood in for safety, or stood out for sea-room," was the reply.

"You were about to add something just now," said Manton, after a moment's reflection.

"Yes; can I trust you, Mr. Manton, with something, which, on no account must get to the ears of the passengers?"

Captain Stone almost whispered the words.

Thorle Manton showed a momentary start; but he answered, promptly:

"Upon my honor as a man, you can; say on, captain."

"Well, owing to the rough weather we have encountered during the voyage, we are almost out of coal! We have not enough, even had we fair water, to run into New York!"

"What!" and this time, Manton, cold, stoical and brave as he was, betrayed some excitement.

"Sh! sh! it must not be known. Moreover, if we can only pick up a pilot all will be well."

"Suppose we pick up none?" and for the first time the young man's voice trembled.

"Then, by old Neptune, we must 'bout ship, lift the propeller, and stand out to sea, under sail, and run before the gale!" was the vehement reply. "That's what I don't wish to do; for then there *will* be danger!"

For five minutes not a word was spoken.

The wild winds shrieked through the icy shrouds and the moaning waters rushed sullenly by.

"Heaven forbid such a necessity!" at length muttered Manton. "But, captain," he continued, "if we do succeed in getting a pilot, can we make the run to New York *to-night*?"

"Yes, easily, and by eight bells, at the latest—midnight, you know."

"Can we get there *before* the *City of Chester* does? You know she sailed from Liverpool on the same day, and at the same hour we did. Can we beat her in?"

His question was even more earnest than his last.

The old seaman wondered, but with something like pride in his tones, he replied:

"Yes, sir! The *City of Chester* is a smart craft, and not to be despised; but in weather like this, the Adriatic can just walk away from her. I'll bet a whale against a codfish, that the '*City*' won't shove her nose into the New York harbor before to-morrow night, and that at this very moment, she is a clean three hundred miles astern of us!"

"Thank God for that assurance!" muttered the young man heartily.

"You seem interested in that craft, and her making port?" said the skipper.

"I am," was the reply.

Just then the quartermaster returned. He brought with him a lantern.

The conversation between Captain Stone and his mysterious passenger, ceased.

Margoun, the Hindoo, who had not spoken a word thus far, suddenly started as the quartermaster's lantern flashed in the murky air. He advanced a pace and glanced quickly down at the dark deck, several feet below. But in a moment he recovered himself, and resumed his position by the guy.

No one had noticed his sudden movement.

When the quartermaster reached the staging, the skipper said at once:

"Go forward, Lowndes, get a gang of men, and *skid* twenty barrels of mess-pork to the engine-room. We are out of coal; but pork will burn! Hark you, Lowndes, keep this from the passengers."

"Ay, ay, captain," and the obedient sailor hurried away again.

Just as he was descending from the bridge, his lantern flashed upon an object, huddled under the high bulwarks.

Thorle Manton saw it; and a low, bitter oath escaped his lips. He sprang forward.

But the Hindoo quietly laid his strong hand upon his arm, whispered something in his ear, and pointed below.

That object was the head of a man, half muffled in a coarse woolen comforter; and a face, white, thin, cadaverous, and devilish in expression, gleamed for an instant in the passing light.

Then it was gone.

CHAPTER II.

ABROAD IN THE NIGHT—BLONDE AND BRUNETTE.

At the corner of a narrow dingy street in the great city of New York, on this night of storm and wind a tall, slender man, well wrapped and gloved, stood with bent head under the light of a flaring lamp.

The street was in the neighborhood of the Battery. Its entire extent was only two blocks, and it was illumined by only two lamps—one, under which the man stood, the other at the further terminus of the gloomy way. It was now half-choked with great drifts of snow; for the storm had been howling since an early hour in the afternoon.

The man who stood at the corner and braved the driving snow and cutting blasts, drew his long overcoat around him; but he did not move. He was thinking; and he heeded not in the least, the flying flakes whirling around him.

The place was lonely; and, though only seven o'clock in the evening, it had long been deserted. Not a pedestrian was in sight; not a solitary vehicle creaked by. The man was all alone in the storm, in the dreariness.

"And *he* is coming home!" at last he muttered fiercely, looking up and shaking the snow from his person. "Two long years, and more, he has been gone, throwing away his money abroad, with a lavish hand! And all that time I have been putting great heaps of crispy bank-notes to his account!"

"But have I not also lined my own pockets? And can old Gilbert Grayling discover the little leak through which such a precious current has been dropping, drop by drop, into *my* treasury? No, no; do I not keep the books? Fool, I, not to cover up my own tracks! But, let me see," and, fumbling under his coat, he drew out a massive gold watch, hastily consulting it by the flickering lamplight. "Yes, I must be going. My day's work is over; now, that of the night begins!"

"Yes, old Gilbert Grayling is coming home—will soon arrive. And he brings with him a new wife, a *young* wife, to be mistress at the grand old Grange! Who can she be? That he did not condescend, in his letter, to tell me. What will the haughty-browed beauty, Grace Grayling, say to all this? How will *she* fancy being deposited at the Grange, and a step-mother, I daresay as young as she is, put in her place? Well," and he laughed, "her chagrin will be to me, at least, some triumph. By heavens, I hate her, and her old father, too! Why do I hate him? He trusts me; I have absolute charge of his business, and he pays me well."

Plunging into the deep snow-drifts, he made his way along the narrow, deserted street. Ten minutes later, he stopped before a low, dingy door. Not a trace of light came from the small, unpretentious house. The shutters in the lower story were closed, and looked as if they were seldom opened. The cold, bare panes in the upper windows were black as the night itself. Before the door lay a great bank of snow which had been blown there.

"Curses," muttered the fellow, angrily. "The old woman knew that it was time for me to come home; why didn't she shovel this snow away? I suppose she has left that for me to do. Bah! we'll see about that!"

He struck several sharp blows on the panel of the door; but there was no response.

The man rapped again, and louder than before. Still no response.

"Curses, I say! can the old woman be asleep—and at this early hour? I'll kick the door down unless she answers!"

He applied his boot vigorously to the shaky panel, when a window in the second story was raised, and a head was protruded.

"Who is there?" came a tremulous voice. "Who! confound it, 'tis I, old woman!" he answered roughly. "In Satan's name, what do you mean by keeping me out here? Come down and let me in—"

"Coming—coming, my son! I was tired, and fell into—"

The window rattled down, and a few moments later the door was opened.

Far back down the narrow hallway, which was revealed, burned a faint light. It was bright enough to bring into relief the form of the person who stood in the doorway.

It was that of an old woman, slightly bent with years, but remarkably tall.

"Ah, Abner, my son, I am so sorry that I kept you so—"

"Then out of the way, and let me get in to the stove," he interrupted, pushing rudely by her. But he paused as he entered the passage. Glancing back through the door, which was still open, he said:

"If that snow is left to drift there all night, there'll be no getting out to-morrow; and as I have to go out to-night—and a long way, too—why suppose—"

"Going out again, Abner?" broke in the old woman, solicitously.

"Yes, mother, and on other people's business," answered the man in a softer tone. "I must see Grace Grayling to-night! But, as I am tired, suppose you get a shovel and amuse yourself by cleaning off the sidewalk? Be in a hurry, too; I am hungry."

He turned abruptly into a room on the passage.

The old woman's face was suddenly a theater of storming passions. A hot, fierce reply was upon her lips, and had Abner Denby remained, it would have fallen upon his ears.

An old-time, bitter memory was stirring her; and her son's harsh, cruel words had been fuel to the flame which had so suddenly, in her shriveled bosom, flashed into life.

"Ah! Abner Denby, you are your wicked, bloody-handed father over and over again!" she ejaculated, clutching her talon-like fingers together. "He cared for nothing but ease, plenty of money, and—vengeance! You are the same. Ay! and your brother Moses, now abroad— But, look to yourself, Abner! My love for you may yet— However," and softly closing the front door, she turned down the passage, "I will shovel the snow away; yes, old as I am, I will; I must."

When Abner Denby entered the room, he flung his hat and overcoat aside, and approaching the glowing stove, leisurely drew off his warm, fur-lined gloves.

The apartment in which the man stood was small; but it was comfortably furnished. Not a ray of the bright light within could struggle out; for, in addition to the closed shutters, heavy curtains, of dark-colored stuff, hung before the windows.

"Genial and cosy enough, perhaps!" he muttered, "but not good enough for me. I shall sometime have what is better, as sure as—"

The light from the flaming gas-jet flashed over his face and figure.

The former was small, sallow-white, lean and square-shaped. A tow-hued, straggling mustache fringed his lip, but did not add to his appearance. The forehead was low and retreating, and a pair of lead-blue eyes flashed from their deep sockets. The only manly features he possessed were the jaw and the chin. The first was firm and square, the latter was bold and prominent.

In figure he towered more than six feet, but spare and slender almost to deformity.

The clinking sound of the shovel at work with the snow echoed distinctly in the room.

The young man cast himself into a chair by the table. From the breast-pocket of his coat he took out two letters and laid them before him. One envelope—the larger—bore an English postage-stamp; the other had nothing on its surface except the superscription in plain, bold characters:

"MISS GRACE GRAYLING,
New York City.

"Thro' Mr. Abner Denby."

Denby picked up this letter and closely scrutinized it. It was not sealed with wax, as had been the case with the larger envelope; the flap was only gummed down.

"I would like to know what that letter contains!" muttered the fellow. "Why did he close it? 'Tis not customary in such cases. Does old Gilbert Grayling distrust me? He may have written something in that letter which he does not care for me to see. Shall I look inside that letter? Well, I daresay I will!"

In an elegantly-furnished apartment sat two young girls. The room was on the second floor of a fashionable seminary on Madison square, in the city of New York.

They appeared to be about the same age—not far from twenty-one. Both were pretty and wondrously rosy and fresh-looking. One was a blonde, with a peachy face, dark-brown eyes and a wealth of auburn hair. The other was a quiet, subdued brunette, with glittering, rather suspicious eyes, a rich, olive complexion, a full, curving mouth, and tresses that, in abundance and glory, vied with those of her fairer companion.

The face of the blonde was all amiability; though the bright sparkle in her large, lustrous eyes showed that she had spirit enough—with some to spare. The face of the brunette, at the first glance, was as innocent as that of her room-mate; at the second glance it was not. There was a peculiar glitter in her midnight eyes—now and then bent with a strange, searching light upon the blonde; and certain deep-cut lines lurking near her proud mouth showed one of two things; either she had an envious disposition, or she had seen trouble and met with disappointments in her young life. Perhaps, in her composition, there was a blending of the two. A close reader of human character would have denoted her as *deep*.

The blonde was Grace Grayling, daughter of Gilbert Grayling the aristocrat.

The brunette was Clara Dean. She was Mr. Grayling's ward, and had been under his charge since she was fifteen.

A half-hour passed; not a word had been spoken between the girls. The winter storm howled without and driving snowflakes struck the windows with audible spats.

At last Grace, half-pettishly, cast her books from her and said:

"I'll not look at that lesson again! not if I miss every word in it to-morrow, and madame suspends me a week for being negligent! There!"

The brunette, who was still poring over her books, glanced up at her.

"Madame will never suspend you for *anything*, Grace," she said, quietly, though as her blazing eyes swept over the other, a little sneer was upon her lip.

"Pshaw! and why not, Clara?"

"Because your father is a millionaire. With others, however, it might be different—with myself, for instance."

Grace started slightly, and gazed at her friend as though she did not comprehend her. But, in a tone more serious than was her wont, she said:

"Certainly you should not speak thus, Clara; you are not a poor girl, and you know it."

"I certainly am not rich; and I know that with marvelous distinctness! But, if things had—"

She paused and fastened her jetty eyes upon Grace's face.

"But what, Clara?"

"Do you urge me, Grace?" asked the other, calmly, her eyes never leaving her room-mate's face.

"What mean you? Certainly, Clara."

"Then I'll finish what I was saying. If I had kept the fifteen thousand dollars which your father lost for me, I would now be comparatively rich, to say the least."

Grace recoiled; her great brown eyes flashed, and a resentful flush swept into her cheeks. A hot reply was upon her lips; but, by an effort, she kept it back, though her bosom rose and fell under the strain.

But, Clara Dean was as calm and as imperturbable as a marble Minerva.

"I think it unkind and ungenerous in you, Clara, to refer to that matter in such a way," at length said Grace, her voice trembling.

"You urged me."

"But, certainly, you know that my father invested your money in that stock with the best of intentions! Nor can you forget, Clara, that where you lost fifteen thousand dollars he lost more than fifty thousand! Besides that, remember what he has done, and is doing for you, to say nothing—"

"We will not discuss the matter; I must look over my lessons," quietly interrupted Clara, as at last removing her gaze from Grace, she bent over her books again.

Grace Grayling did not notice the fiery glance shot at her, as the brunette lowered her head. But, feeling uneasy and distressed—why, she could not tell—she arose and approaching a window, shaded her eyes and glanced out at the wild, stormy night.

And there she stood for a long time.

At last, with a weary sigh, she turned away.

Clara had now laid aside her books. Once again her eyes were bent upon her companion, with a glance full of meaning.

"Did you ever hear, Grace," she asked, in a low voice, "of a certain man, whose name is *Thorle Manton*?"

In an instant Grace Grayling's cheeks were like ashes.

CHAPTER III.

SUSPICIONS—OPENING LETTERS.

"RESTRAIN yourself, sahib; the serpent has gone," whispered the Hindoo in Thorle Manton's ear. "He has gone! but the eyes of Margoun are wide open, sahib!"

With this, the swarthy East Indian gently yet resolutely pressed the young man back, while he grasped again the iron guy to prevent himself from being swept from the bridge. For the Adriatic was lurching wildly; and at the moment that Margoun spoke, a huge billow had dashed over the steamer.

Then suddenly the loud voice of Mr. Jackson, the mate, was heard bellowing through a speaking-trumpet:

"Ho, there, captain! We are running on shoals! Let her fall off!"

"Ay, ay, Mr. Jackson!" shouted the captain in reply at the top of his voice. "Quick, Lowndes," to the quartermaster who still stood on the stairs by the bridge. "Away with you and tell them to heave her over to starboard—quick! Then attend to the barrels of pork. Go!"

The man hurried away toward the stern of the great ship.

"By old Neptune, this is getting to be a serious matter!" growled the skipper. "I don't know exactly where I am! And hang it, there's at least fifty tons of ice hanging to our bows; the Adriatic is already down by the head! I must slow her down; for this is risky business!"

He laid his hand upon a pull, which connected with the warning-bell far down in the engine-room. He gave a single sharp jerk and awaited.

Almost instantly there was a perceptible halt in the ship's onward way; though she still forged ahead.

"Confound it! it can't be helped!" muttered the skipper, ominously. "She may be blown from her course; but if they'll only keep her head— Hal! there she goes!"

As he was speaking, the ship suddenly shifted her course several points. The wheel had been hove over to starboard.

For several minutes, it seemed that the gallant craft would be beaten back by the fierce wind which now struck her almost broadside on; but nobly she held up to her work. Inch by inch, foot by foot, she fought her way.

This combat with the elements lasted for several moments, and a silence only broken by the gale piping through the frozen cordage, and the loud roar of the angry waters, pervaded the steamer.

Then the voice of the mate was again heard, booming back:

"All right, captain! The lead finds no bottom—we are in deep water!"

"Ay, ay," shouted the captain. "And God be thanked!" he continued, in a deep, fervent tone. "Now I'll ring her on, Mr. Manton, and, by old Neptune, you shall see what the Adriatic can do!"

He jerked the bell-pull twice. An instant later, the steamer sprung forward like a great winged bird of the night.

"But hadn't you better go below, Mr. Manton?" asked the skipper, after a pause. "Haven't you seen enough of this weather?" and the old sea-dog laughed half-banteringly.

"I enjoy it, captain," was the reply. "I am in hopes of getting a view of the red light of some pilot-boat."

"Shiver my top-lights, but you have got backbone, sir!"

"No more than Margoun, here, captain," and the speaker laughed low. "But do you give up all hope of falling in with a pilot to-night?"

The question was put very earnestly.

"Confound 'em! that's what's annoying me, Mr. Manton!" grunted the skipper, glancing hastily around in the gray murk of the night.

"If we had one aboard now, why, sir, the Adriatic would be tied to her wharf in three hours' time! But, indeed, you had better go below," continued the skipper, solicitously. "If a pilot is to be had, you will know it soon enough."

"I would give five thousand dollars if one stood on our decks at this minute!" ejaculated young Manton, earnestly.

Captain Stone glanced wonderingly at the young man, who was more and more of a mystery to him.

"Without being impertinent, Mr. Manton, you handle a plenty of money," he said.

"I have more than I care for, or can spend," was the hasty reply. "But I have some letters to send back to Europe, as soon as we land—if we ever do land. So I'll go below and write."

He hesitated; as if he had forgotten something, he suddenly drew still nearer the skipper, and said:

"Did you see that *thing* down there under the bulwarks, just a while ago, captain?"

"What? you mean that white-faced, lantern-jawed lubber, who was there?"

"The same fellow," and Thorle Manton's words were hard and cold.

"Ay, ay; and more than once I have seen him skulking about the ship in portions where he is not allowed to go; he is a steerage passenger."

"He is a deep-dyed villain," said young Manton. "He is after some deviltry, or I can't read his face! Do you know his name, captain?"

"No; but 'tis on the purser's books," replied the skipper.

"Yes. Well, I have examined the steerage list. That fellow's name is Moses Driscoll; at least that is given, in the list, as his name. Now, captain, in your ear: that man, for some or other reason, is on my track."

"What the deuce do you mean, Mr. Manton?" exclaimed the captain, with a start, and, for the time, forgetting the howling storm.

"That that villain has designs upon my life; he is after my blood!"

Captain Stone recoiled, and gazed through the darkness at the speaker.

"Surely you must be mistaken, Mr. Manton!" he ejaculated. "By old Neptune, if I believed such a thing I'd slap the fellow in irons, or heave him overboard!"

"No need of either!" hissed the other. "I am watching him; and so is Margoun! He had better not have been born than—however, captain, will you listen a moment?" and, grasping the railing, he turned earnestly toward the skipper.

"Certainly, sir."

Captain Stone was interested.

"Well, sir, as far back as six months ago, when I landed at Naples, after a long voyage from the—however, as far back as that time, I saw that man—or one that looks as much like him as his shadow. More than once I detected him dogging my footsteps. One night as I was entering the San Carlo theater, he pushed against me with evil intent; for in the bosom of his coat I saw a knife."

Young Manton paused, and ground his teeth together.

"Yes, sir; go on," urged the captain.

"Whatever were his designs, they were frustrated; for my faithful Margoun here, unceremoniously hurled him aside, and flung him to the pavement. The next night, as I was strolling along the Chiaia, enjoying the grand scene as the rising moon glinted over the bay, a pistol-shot rung in the air, and a deadly slug whizzed by my cheek. Turning quickly I saw a tall, slender man speeding away. He soon escaped into the shadows of the gardens. But," and again there was a hiss in his voice, "had Margoun been with me, that scoundrel would not have lived an hour!"

Again he paused; and again the interested skipper urged him to proceed.

"Not to tire you," resumed the young man hastily, at the same time drawing his storm-coat more closely around him, for the terrible cold was at last having some effect upon him, "I would say that afterward I came across the scoundrel in every city that I visited—Rome, Florence, Berlin, Munich, Paris, and, last, in London. In that city, I was loitering one afternoon in the gloomy depths of old St. Paul's, and when in an unfrequented and deserted part of the Cathedral, I was suddenly clutched by the throat. I turned just in time to put aside the assassin's knife, which was aimed at my heart. But before I could throttle the villain—as before high heaven, I would have done!—he broke from my grasp and fled. And now, if I can at all trust to my memory, that fellow is aboard the Adriatic! When we were two days out at sea, I saw him—but only three times since; the last time, twenty minutes ago. He only shows himself, to me at least, by night."

The old skipper had listened intently to this strange recital.

"It does look strange," he ejaculated, as Manton ceased. "If I was only sure that this was the fellow, I'd have a pair of bracelets on him before the next bell! But—"

"Take no steps at all in the matter," hastily interrupted the young man. "Our voyage, I

hope, is almost over; leave the fellow to me and to—Margoun. Now—"

He was moving away when the skipper stopped him with a question:

"Have you any idea who this fellow is, Mr. Manton?"

Thorle Manton paused several minutes before he answered.

"He resembles a man—two men—whom I once knew by sight," he said, very slowly, as if partly lost in thought.

"Do you mind telling me the names of those two men, sir?"

Again the young man hesitated; but it was only for an instant.

"No, captain; their names were Abner and Moses Denby, brothers, and they were so much alike that they could scarcely be told apart."

"Had you, or have you, reason to think that either or both of them, had a grudge against you?"

"Both! ay, both! They had good cause," and Thorle Manton's wild, bitter laugh rung out once more. "I once slapped Abner Denby's face for him, and afterward, when I was waylaid by him and his brother, I horsewhipped both the rascals!"

"But that was long ago?"

"More than five years, captain. But," and his voice was low and serious, "those white-faced brothers belong to a scheming, bloodthirsty family, the members of which, male or female, never forget a grudge. The father was hung in New York for a foul, heartless murder. But now I must go below. Whew! how it blows!"

"My advice, Mr. Manton, is to keep your weather-eye open!" said Captain Stone, as his passenger descended from the bridge.

"Trust me and Margoun for that!" was the rejoinder.

Followed by the faithful Hindoo, the young man picked his way along the slippery decks toward the distant saloon in the rear. Though he looked closely around he noticed nothing suspicious as he strode on. Nor did the keen-eyed East Indian observe anything to put him on his guard.

Yet, not a moment after the two had passed, a man drew cautiously from beneath the life-boat strapped to the deck abaft the bridge, and, rising, followed stealthily behind them. As he passed the flash of light that came through the skylight over the engine-room, his face, for a fleeting moment, was revealed.

That face was white, thin to emaciation, with a wolfish expression and glittering eyes, the features half-concealed by a coarse fur cap drawn over the brows, and muffled in a woolen comforter—both articles now stiff with frozen spray.

Stooping to his hands and knees he crept on toward the windy quarter-deck, far aft.

Abner Denby, still clutching the letter, the contents of which he was determined to know, turned from the glowing stove as if to leave the room. But he checked himself and thrusting the letter in his bosom halted.

The door opened and his mother entered. Having finished clearing the sidewalk of snow, she now brought in her son's supper. Her face was placid again; the wrinkled brow was smooth, and her old eyes, in which, some moments before, baleful fires had glittered, shone kindly and lovingly as they rested upon the well-clad form of him who was her own flesh and blood.

She was a strange looking old creature—one who, at a first or second or even a third glance, was repulsive in the extreme.

Her face was that of her son, in an older, more rugged and time-marked mold. It was bronzed in hue, with, here and there, little groups of hairs sprouting from it. Her hair was sparse, iron-gray in color, and falling in unkempt confusion around her cadaverous cheeks. Her eyes, scarcely visible under the saggy brows, were bright and roving, giving her a sinister appearance.

She was clad in cheap stuff, which contrasted strongly and strangely with her son's rich attire.

"Here is your supper, Abner," she said in a kind tone. "I hope you will like it: you know I am a good cook."

"I hope you have kept it hot; no cold victuals for me," was the harsh reply.

"Just from the range, hot and steaming, my son," she answered, persuasively, though she shot a reproachful look at him.

The supper was a tempting one; and Abner Denby did ample justice to it. He ate greedily,

and in a few minutes pushed the things from him, turning his chair toward the stove.

After the plates were removed Abner wheeled abruptly toward the old woman and said:

"By this afternoon's mail, mother, I received a letter from Gilbert Grayling. It was written from Liverpool, and came by a Boston steamer; hence, there was some delay in getting it."

"Well?" she asked, almost fiercely, as she saw him pause. "What of it?"

"He is coming home!"

"Coming home? Furies! Then—"

"Exactly. He may prevent me from appropriating five thousand dollars for the next year, as I have done for the last two! But, trust me, I'll find another leak. He gives me news—something that will interest *you*," and he laughed tauntingly.

"Out with it!"

"Old Grayling has married again—has a new wife, a young one, I dare say not older than that stuck-up daughter—"

"Furies!" and the old woman gnashed her teeth. "Yet, forty years ago, he was my promised husband! he and his hundred thousands! He flung me off—"

"When he learned that you had the greed of a wolf, and the temper of the —," interrupted Abner, coarsely. "But that isn't all."

"Go on, then," she said, sullenly.

"He inclosed a letter for his daughter, Grace, in my envelope. I am to hand it to her in person."

"Nothing strange in that."

"But, there may be something strange in that letter," he said. "I must look into it."

"How?"

"Easy enough; I have done it before to-night. Steam and mucilage can undo and do work!"

"What do you mean?"

"Get me the kettle with some boiling water, and I'll soon show you. Off with you; time is precious. I've something else to do to-night."

The old woman hastened out, to quickly return with the kettle—the hot vapor puffing from the spout.

Taking it from her, Abner held the sealed flap of the envelope to the escaping steam. In a short while it loosened, and then opened.

Withdrawing the written sheet he glanced hastily over it and started back.

"May Satan seize him! He is beginning to distrust me!" he ejaculated, glaring at the letter.

CHAPTER IV.

MOTHER AND SON—PLOTING.

OLD Mrs. Denby looked at her white-faced son in surprise.

"What is it, Abner, my son?"

But Abner did not answer. He was now holding the sheet close to the streaming gas-jet, his eyes bent upon it, reading it word by word.

"What is it, my son?" repeated the old woman. "What, in that letter, has so upset you?"

"Didn't I just tell you?" he answered, roughly. "In this letter to his daughter old Grayling shows signs of losing faith in my honesty, thinks that the income from the business is falling off too much—which is an unaccountable circumstance to him. Bah! But if he was just certain that I was trusty and faithful—"

He paused and laughed.

"Well?" impatiently from his mother.

"Why, he would not object to me even as his son-in-law!" muttered Abner, grimly, his eyes flashing over the letter.

"What! He who once flung *my* love away would not object to one of my blood—"

"Listen. I'll read you this precious letter."

In a low voice he read it through. The mother did not lose a single word.

"So! so!" she muttered, as Abner folded the sheet and slid it back into the envelope. "That is certainly a come-down for old Gilbert Grayling! Perhaps it is remorse? But, think you, my son, that Grace Grayling cares anything for you?"

"Not a button! Confound her, she despises me! But, for all that, I wouldn't mind having her for my wife—not I! With her father's influence to back me there's more than a chance that I can win her. By Jove! he *shall* have confidence in me; Grace Grayling is a stake worth playing for."

He arose and promenaded the room for ten minutes.

"How can you re-establish his trust and confidence in you, Abner?" asked his mother, unable to be silent.

"Just what I was thinking about," he replied, pausing and throwing himself again into

his chair. "I think I have hit upon a plan that will work, though I'll have to sacrifice something—that is for a time."

"Sacrifice? I hope not money?"

"Yes, money, for— There, don't interrupt me! You see, I have managed to lay away two thousand dollars, without accounting for it in Gilbert Grayling's books. I had intended it for my own pockets. But I will turn it over to him, telling him that I have ferreted out some irregularities, and forced a collection of that money; you see?"

"Very good. But then you—"

"I understand you; don't distress yourself. I'll get it all back, will bring down two birds at a shot, and all this very night!"

"How? I would like to know!"

"You heard the letter, eh?" and as his leaden-blue eyes rested upon her a sinister smile swept over his white face.

"Yes—every word."

"Grayling directs me to hand to his daughter as much money as she may wish," pursued Abner.

"What of that?"

"A great deal! I have a 'pocketful' with me; and I never pay out money without taking a receipt."

"What in the world are you—"

"You are stupid, mother! Don't you take my drift? I mean, in plain English, this: I'll give Grace Grayling five hundred dollars, and take her receipt for one thousand! Ha! ha! She'll never look at the receipt, or think of counting the money. Old Grayling, on seeing the receipt, will not question the transaction; and I—why, I'll get back the five hundred dollars at once!"

For five minutes the old woman gazed at him. Her countenance showed no repugnance at the villainy which her son was so coolly plotting. So far from it, a gleam of admiration glittered in her sunken eyes.

"Good—very good, Abner!" she said.

"Yes; and to begin matters, I'll write the receipt now. If the girl detects me, I'll have an excuse handy; trust me for that!"

He drew a sheet of paper toward him, and wrote a few hasty lines, which he tore off and placed in his pocket.

"Now I'll fix this letter again, and all will be well," continued Abner; and he proceeded to regum the edge with mucilage, and reseal it. It looked as if it had never been disturbed.

"So far, so good!" he ejaculated complacently. "Now for a long tramp! I must go up to Madison Square, to give Grace the letter and the money. But 'pon my soul! with old Grayling to back me, I would—"

He hesitated; his pale, narrow brow contracted, while a kindling gleam lit up his cold blue eyes, and an expression, difficult to define, grew around his thin-lipped mouth.

"What now, Abner?"

"Only this: I wish that dark-haired beauty, Clara Dean—old Grayling's ward—was in Grace's place. As a wife to me, she would be worth fifty of the latter. Ay! smooth and bland as she is on the surface, she is, at heart—just like me!—daring and devilish! More than all, Clara Dean would be glad to make a catch of me."

"Perhaps, perhaps, my son; but do you love her? Do you love either one of those high-stationed girls?"

"Love! LOVE!" and the man seemed transformed into a fiend. "Can my callous heart love anything but money? Five years ago, it idolized one who was false to me! It would have shed its last drop of blood for the golden-haired Cynthia Summers, who turned from me and gave her heart to the dark-browed, imperious Thorle!"

He paused abruptly; the white froth of rage flecked his lips, and a small red spot glowed in each of his cheeks.

Almost in terror, the old woman gazed at him. Fiend though he was by nature, it was seldom that she saw him as he now was. With a shudder which she could not repress, she turned from him.

"For that affair I have sworn away Thorle Manton's life!" hissed Abner, after a lapse of several minutes. "Ay! and so has Moses! who is even now abroad hunting the fellow down! And traveling, too, on old Gilbert Grayling's money," he continued with a wicked laugh. "He nor I can forget the lash which that bon-armed scoundrel struck across our shoulders!"

"My dear boy, you have cause to hate Thorle Manton; I join my prayers to yours, that the hour of vengeance will soon arrive!—if, indeed, ere this, Moses has not done the deed. But where can they be now? 'Tis long since you heard from Moses."

"All I know is this: For years I have been watching the foreign papers, to find some trace of Thorle Manton, who fled the country after his bankruptcy. More than seven months ago, I chanced to see his name in the *Alexandria Oriental*, published in Egypt. He was booked aboard a steamer bound to Naples. Then, you know, Moses went abroad, and when last I heard from him, though he had failed in several opportunities, he was still on the track."

"But if, after all, Thorle Manton is alive, and should succeed in getting back to his native land, will he, too, not have ample cause to hate old Gilbert Grayling?"

"Ay! ay! The old aristocrat, who pretended to be a great friend of young Manton's father, took a mean advantage of the son's absence and bought the magnificent property on the lake, known as Manton Manor. And he bought it for a mere nothing compared to its real value. True enough, all that! Then, too, the pompous old aristocrat has changed the name of the Manor to Grayling Grange! But, hang it, what do I care for all that? I hate Thorle Manton, and I'll never be satisfied until he is under my heel!"

It was now quite late.

A few moments afterward Abner Denby arose, put on his overcoat and prepared to brave the wintry weather outside. As he was about leaving, his mother drew near him and asked:

"When is Gilbert Grayling expected home, my son?"

"He wrote me that he was to take the Inman line steamer City of Chester, a week from the date of his letter. I inquired at the company's office, and was told that she was due to-night or to-morrow morning, but that the heavy gales which have been prevailing, might possibly delay her."

"Would to heaven that she would go to the bottom and take down with her old Gilbert Grayling and his young wife!" hissed the old woman.

"Amen! amen to that!"

And Abner Denby stole away in the snow which was whirling madly through the deserted streets.

CHAPTER V.

OUT AND THRUST—IN THE DEPTHS.

"I ASKED a plain question: did you ever hear of a man—a young man—named Thorle Manton?"

As Clara Dean spoke, her black eyes flashed covertly over the face of her companion.

As we have mentioned, Grace Grayling's cheeks had paled to an ashen hue, when her room-mate asked her this sudden question. Without at once answering, she turned her face away.

Clara Dean was watching her.

"Did you hear me, Grace, my dear?" she asked, in an insinuating tone.

"Why do you thus question me, Clara?" demanded Grace, her tone cold and formal.

"Oh, for nothing in particular," was the careless reply. "That young man has a strange history. He has had many ups and downs in life; but it now appears that he—"

She smiled softly, and drew her chair closer to the register, up which the genial heat was rushing into the apartment.

Grace shot a quick, searching look at her companion. Do what she could, she frowned.

She had long known Clara Dean, had been constantly thrown with her since they were fifteen years of age. And, despite some little peculiarities in her father's black-haired ward, she loved her; what was more, she had implicit confidence in her.

But now, as she caught a view of Clara's face, a suspicion as quick as the lightning's wing flashed over her. What did all this mean? What did it portend? Twice on this night had Clara introduced topics which were extremely disagreeable to her. But to the latter the dark-eyed brunette had never before referred.

However, Grace drove away her suspicions; she was a guileless, noble-hearted girl. Moreover, her curiosity had been excited; so she asked:

"Well, Clara, it appears—what?"

Clara shrugged her shoulders, and bent her head to conceal the sarcastic, triumphant smile that curled her lip, and said very quietly:

"Why this; from last accounts, it most certainly appears that Mr. Thorle Manton is now up in the world—considerably up, at that!"

Grace trembled. What did Clara's earnestness mean? But, still controlling herself, she replied:

"Certainly I have no objection to his prosperity; I only wish him well—the more so, because he was so unfortunate a few years ago."

"Your father profited by Manton's misfor-

tune! Manton Manor is now Grayling Grange!" These words were spoken with a quiet, subdued vehemence.

Grace started; her large brown eyes snapped, and her cheeks glowed like carnations.

"Surely, Clara, you do not impute wrong motives, or dishonest action, in that matter?" she asked, as calmly as she could. "He was the highest bidder; had he not purchased the estate, some one else would—and at a lower figure than papa paid for it."

"It was a great bargain!" muttered Clara, dryly, though she hastened to add: "It was only right, and not at all dishonest that your father secured it. But," in a lower tone, "it's said that Mr. Grayling and old Mr. Manton, long since dead, were bosom friends."

Again Grace frowned; and, as her bosom rose and fell tumultuously, she answered hotly:

"Dishonest! I hope you do not insinuate any such thing, Clara Dean!"

"I said no such thing, Grace," was the tart reply. "But if my memory serves me, you once told me that your father had received a bitter letter from Thorle Manton, written from some almost unheard-of place in the East; and he spoke right out just that same thing."

"Yes, true enough; but Thorle Manton, at that time, did not know it was only my father's generosity which kept him from buying, likewise, the old broken-down rookery known as the Lodge. By that generosity, the young gentleman, if he ever returns home, will certainly have a shelter at least."

Grace spoke earnestly.

"Yet, my dear, you certainly cannot forget that your father wrote you from Europe some months since, that he still intended to purchase the old Lodge estate—that his prompting motive was resentment, because young Manton had written him such a letter?"

Grace had, indeed, forgotten this.

"Well, it would only serve him right," she said, in a vexed tone. "But enough of this, Clara, if you please! You asked me if I had ever heard of Thorle Manton, when you knew very well that I had. Now—"

"Perhaps you have not heard of him lately?—of his prosperity, his sudden and immense wealth?" persisted Clara.

"His wealth—no! And you?"

"I have; and it was only to-night in madame's study-room. You know she takes French newspapers regularly. I can read French, and in one of those papers, *La Patrie*, I read a certain interesting paragraph only a few hours ago. I'll translate it if you will listen."

"Go on," said Grace, interested, despite her recent anger.

Clara drew from her bosom a crushed newspaper, unfolded it, and read as follows, translating as she proceeded:

"A distinguished American, fabulously rich, has just arrived in the city, and is registered at the Grand Hotel. He has been absent from his native land for several years, having spent most of his time in the Far East. 'Tis rumored that his life was attempted a few nights ago in the shadows of the Champs Elysees, by some miscreant. The attempt, however, was frustrated by the gentleman's bravery and presence of mind, but more immediately by his faithful Hindoo valet, whose life, 'tis said, the gallant American once saved at imminent peril to his own. The two create a great sensation, as, side by side—master and man—they dash over the boulevards and through the Bois de Boulogne in a magnificent equipage. 'Tis not known if monsieur will return to America or remain in our gay capital. Our reporter learns from the hotel register that the gentleman's name is Thorle Manton, and that of his trusty valet is Margoun, which, in Hindoostanee, means 'The Watchful.'"

Clara slowly refolded the paper, and cast it upon the table; but her eyes closely swept her friend's face.

Grace leaned her cheek upon her hand, and seemed lost in thought. She was not left long to her musings.

"Who can tell but that Thorle Manton may come back to the Grange—to his old manor-house, and try to get possession of what was once his, and which he inherited from a long line of ancestors?" inquired Clara.

"He cannot get it back," replied Grace, hastily. "The estate was sold for debts, and with the purchase-money, which papa paid out, Mr. Manton's many debts were settled."

"Yet, stranger things have happened! The young man might claim illegality of proceedings, that he was not notified, etc., and he would have a good case."

Grace Grayling's face grew serious; her brow clouded. What her companion had said, though only in surmise, made her uneasy.

"But, Grace, my dear, continued the brunette, and in a low tone, "did you ever hear of

Thorle Manton's love-scape, here in New York, some half-dozen years ago?"

"I don't care to talk further about him, Clara, if it is the same to you," was the cold reply.

"Oh! very well; I thought it might interest you. He loved a gay young damsel by the name of Cynthia Summers. The affair—"

"Yes, I recall it; and Thorle Manton horse-whipped my father's head clerk for pushing himself into her presence," interrupted Grace, a little maliciously.

Clara Dean's face flushed, and her rich red lips went tightly together. The shaft had found a mark! But the maiden rejoined:

"Despite all that, your father's 'head-clerk' has lifted and does lift, his eyes to the rich young heiress, his employer's daughter."

Grace's cheeks glowed, as she snapped out:

"The white-faced, dull-eyed servant! I despise him! I only wonder that my father keeps him. He is tricky and untrustworthy. No, no, Clara"—and she forced back her usual good humor—"I'll leave Abner Denby to you—if you like him!"

"Perhaps you will wait for the coming of Thorle Manton! For, though he is past thirty, he is rich, and riches hide a multitude of blemishes. Besides that, such an alliance would obviate much trouble and annoyance concerning the Grange estate, which may—"

"No more of that, Clara! Not another—Hal a caller at such an hour, and on such a night?"

Grace suddenly ceased as the front door-bell jangled through the large building.

A few moments later a servant knocked, and entered the room.

"A gentleman wishes to see you in the parlor, Miss Grayling," she said.

"Me! why—"

"Yes, ma'am; here's his card."

Grace took the card and glanced at it. A scowl darkened her face as she read: "ABNER DENBY."

Below the name was penciled this:

"Wish to see you, only a few minutes—on business. A. D."

Thorle Manton, after leaving Captain Stone at his post of peril on the bridge of the steamer, soon reached the more congenial quarters of the saloon. Close behind him and ever watchful, strode Margoun, the Hindoo.

The long saloon was almost deserted: it was so save by an occasional steward, who now and then passed through to see that nothing was broken by the violent rolling of the ship.

Though the hour was comparatively early, the few cabin passengers, awed by the storm, had, some time before, retired to their state-rooms, there to await, with as much calmness as possible, the result of the battle between the gallant Adriatic and the storm-king.

Young Manton glanced around the deserted apartment; a mocking smile parted his lips; but he nodded his head approvingly.

"They have not sailed as many seas as I have," he muttered. "But have they—has a single one of them all—breasted the heart-tempests which have—Pshaw! let that pass. Day is breaking—time, the great healer, is blunting the—Hal you, my faithful Margoun!"

For the time he had forgotten the presence of his constant attendant.

"Margoun heard the the sahib speak—Margoun listens and waits."

"Yes, yes, good Margoun. Here, take these wet things, and carry them to my state-room. Bring back a pair of slippers and my dressing-gown, Margoun."

"Yes, sahib."

The Hindoo took the wet weather-coat, storm-hat and gloves, and hurried away.

The young man was now standing by one of the bright swinging lamps of the saloon.

He was tall, powerfully built, yet of elegant form. He seemed to be little past thirty years of age. His hair was jetty black, and falling over his collar, it gave him a bold and strikingly romantic appearance. His eyes were of the same midnight hue. A long, heavy mustache fringed his mouth. His chin and cheeks were smoothly shaven, and almost as swarthy as a Moor's.

A mingled expression rested upon his face. It was one of trouble and resolution.

He was clad richly. A large diamond of rare value sparkled in his shirt-front, and another glittered on the little finger of his left hand.

"I forgot my writing materials!" he exclaimed, in a vexed tone. "However, I will talk with Margoun a little; I'll have time for the letters afterward."

At that moment, the Hindoo reappeared, bringing the dressing-gown and slippers.

"Sit down, Margoun; I wish to talk with you," said Manton, kindly, even affectionately. "I wish to consult you concerning certain matters."

"Yes, sahib," and the East Indian seated himself.

"Do you know, Margoun, that— Ha!"

The young man had cast his eyes reflectively upward. He started, and thrust his hand in his bosom, as he saw a white, square faced glued to one of the skylights above. A pair of wolfish eyes in that face were glaring down upon those who sat in the saloon.

The face was the same that had been seen under the bulwarks.

In an instant, young Manton had drawn a pistol.

Margoun sprang up also; and in his strong right hand was suddenly gripped a long blade of twisted steel—a weapon known in the far Eastern countries as a *kreese*, and much used by the Malay pirates.

But, in the twinkling of an eye, the face was gone.

"By heavens!—"

Before Manton could speak further, the dull booming of a cannon broke on the outside air, and echoed faintly in the saloon. A moment later, a gun from the Adriatic's decks answered. Then came a cheer from above.

"Thank God? A pilot! a pilot, at last!" exclaimed the young man, thrusting his pistol in his bosom. "Come, Margoun!"

Followed by the Hindoo, he sprang up the companionway, and rushed upon the bleak, wind-blown quarter-deck.

Sure enough, there, close to windward, was the red light of a pilot-boat. It could be seen, through the flying snow, rocking to and fro, high in the murky night.

Then came a hail:

"What steamer is that?"

"The Adriatic, of the White Star Line, Captain Stone, commanding! What boat is that?" shouted back the old skipper, from the bridge.

"Pilot-boat Nautilus, Captain Kelso, commanding!" was the reply from the swift-winged pilot-boat.

"All right; I'll slow down for you to come aboard!"

Ten minutes later, a brawny, spray-covered pilot clambered up the forechains of the large steamer.

All this time, Thorle Manton, leaning over the rail, was looking intently on. At last, with a glad glow in his heart, he turned away.

At that instant, a tall man, who had been concealed in the shadows, darted out, flung himself upon the unsuspecting passenger, bore him back with irresistible force, and hurled him headlong overboard into the seething waters.

Quick as lightning, Margoun struck the fellow down, and with a low cry, as he tightened his belt around him, rushed forward, sprang over the icy rail, and flashed down into the black, angry sea.

CHAPTER VI.

A BUSINESS VISIT—STRANGE FACES.

GRACE GRAYLING'S face flushed as she read Abner Denby's card; then it grew to a deadly pallor.

Hastily dismissing the girl, at the same time angrily flinging the card from her, the beautiful blonde turned to her friend and schoolmate. In a moment she seemed to have quite forgotten their recent talk, which was almost an angry altercation.

The dark-eyed brunette was watching her. A glance at her face was sufficient to satisfy any one that she had not already forgotten what had passed.

"What shall I do, Clara?" asked Grace, as if she was undecided.

"Do! Why, certainly you have not for an instant thought of refusing to see Mr. Denby?" was the somewhat impertinent reply.

"Yes, I had thought of doing just that thing!" retorted Grace. "I despise Abner Denby! There is something about him which makes me loathe him. Then, too, to think that I must receive a cur of a fellow, who has been horse-whipped!"

"The fellow may some day square accounts with the other fellow that did it!" earnestly replied Clara, her black eyes flashing venomously. "Abner Denby belongs to a hot-blooded family. They never forget or forgive an injury. You remember the story of young Denby's father? that, after twenty years had passed, he had re-

venge on a man who, that long lapse of time before, had wronged him? Yes, and if the story is true, old Denby had that man's blood!"

"And was hung for the same, right here in New York city! But it strikes me, Clara, that you are a warm champion of Mr. Abner Denby!"

"I am the champion of all the poor and unfavored, who are struggling for a position in this cold world!"

"A good sentiment, Clara, and I applaud it, but in this instance I fear that your sympathies are entirely misplaced. However, let all that be! 'Tis strange that he should call at such a late hour, and in such a storm. Why, bless me, 'tis past ten o'clock!" And she glanced at her watch.

"Late enough it is true; but madame would never have allowed him to enter, unless she was satisfied that his visit was of necessity—one perhaps not of his own choosing. I daresay, Grace, she has confidence in Mr. Denby. Then, too, Mr. Denby may bring you some tidings of your father. You know that it has been more than three months since you have heard from him. Strange, too!"

"Yes, it is strange!" murmured Grace. "And he has been absent now more than two years. Oh, how I long to see him!"

"Do you know Grace, what I think made your father go abroad?" asked Clara, after a little pause, drawing nearer, and looking at her companion with a strange, lurking smile.

"No. What is it?"

"Well, he is aristocratic, and—"

"Come to the point, Clara."

"I simply think just this; as he could not be suited in his own land, he has gone abroad in search—"

She paused—the strange smile still parting her lips.

"In search of what? Do go on, Clara!" urged Grace.

"Why, a new wife—and, if I can read his character a young one. Many such can be bought for money."

Grace stared at her room-mate; but, breaking out into a peal of merry laughter, she exclaimed:

"Nonsense! Such an idea is ridiculous. I fear no such thing—not I!"

"Fear? Then if my surmise should eventuate in a reality, you would not particularly relish the new order of things which would necessarily follow at the Grange?"

"No—indeed I would not," was the prompt rejoinder, in a very serious tone. "I have too long been sole mistress in my father's household, to be— Heaven, I apprehend nothing of this. But the parlor is deserted. You must go with me. I don't care to be alone with that man."

"Well, though you may be a tender and tempting morsel, Grace, yet I don't think that fellow will eat you. However," and the brunette's eyes sparkled, "If you wish, I will go with you. But you had better hurry down first—now. It may look strange to see us both enter at once. I'll follow in a few moments, and will stroll in, as though I thought no company was in the parlor."

"All right; but please do not keep me waiting. I can't bear to be alone with my father's clerk."

"Trust me," quietly answered Clara, as Grace, shaking out her long trail, swept majestically from the room, closing the door after her. "Yes, trust me—to overthrow you, Grace Grayling! I hate all of your name; for 'tis one accursed to me! The memory of my lost money, my fifteen thousand dollars, will never leave my brain—no, no! Yes, I'll accompany the proud beauty; for I would see Abner Denby; I would snare him; I would not be the woman that I am and fail to see that he likes me! Abner Denby," and she turned to the mirror which Grace had just left, "would be a good catch for me."

She uncoiled her massy tresses of raven black, and most elaborately made them up anew. Then she proceeded to change her toilet. When it was completed she was indeed a beautiful and queenly girl.

With a final glance at her lovely self, she turned and left the room.

Grace Grayling hurried along the passage to the stairs; but as she descended the soft-carpeted steps her pace became slower. When she reached the hall below she almost stopped; and as, through the half-opened door of the parlor beyond, she distinctly heard the steps of a man promenading up and down the room, her heart beat violently.

She hated Abner Denby; and for some cause

or other, which she could not define, she feared him. She could account for her hatred, for her "father's head-clerk" had indeed lifted his ambitious eyes to his employer's daughter—had more than once spoken of love to her. This she could not brook; for, however worthy Abner Denby was, his father had committed murder, and suffered for it on the gibbet.

Why she feared him she could not tell.

Summoning her resolution, as a contemptuous expression passed over her face, she again moved on. A moment later she entered the parlor.

No one was there except Abner Denby. He had taken the liberty of laying off his overcoat, and was now striding up and down the room, his hands locked behind him, a precious stone flashing upon one of his long, skinny fingers.

He halted and turned as he saw the peerless beauty of his employer's high-born daughter, and bowed low and respectfully before her. An instant and he was tall and erect as before. Nor was he in the least abashed or embarrassed. He comported himself as though he thought he considered himself the peer to any one in the land.

Though she had seen him many times before, and often noted it, yet now she started at the man's dignified air, and at his rich and faultless attire. She had entered the room with a smothered storm in her bosom, and with wrath upon her tongue. But she kept all this back, and very suddenly too. The man's presence forced in her a sort of respect, which ten minutes before she would not have acknowledged "for the wealth of the Indies."

"I kept you waiting, Mr. Denby. You will please—"

"Just fifteen minutes, Miss Grayling," Denby coolly interrupted, at the same time drawing out his handsome watch and glancing at the dial. "But that is nothing, I assure you," he continued, with another courtly bow; "I am always yours to command, and to—obey."

The last word was spoken hesitatingly; but there was a wealth of meaning in the tone in which it was given.

And there was a wondrous wealth of meaning in Abner Denby's leaden-hued eyes as he swept a quick, searching glance over her face.

Grace had frowned at his abrupt interruption; she now flushed at his significant words. But, controlling herself, she said:

"I regret keeping you the fifteen minutes, which you have so exactly counted, sir. Pray be seated, and I await your pleasure—the object of your very late visit."

She hastened to add the last words; for she was rapidly becoming annoyed at his imperturbable coolness—his brazen effrontery, as she chose to think it.

Quietly sinking into a chair, he said:

"I know it is late, Miss Grayling; but I could not get here sooner. You know I work hard, very hard, for your father."

"I am sure he pays you very well for your services," retorted Grace, with some asperity.

"Ah, yes, very well; but then you see, money cannot always liquidate debts! A kind word, favor, trust, will often go further than gold or greenbacks. I am proud to say that I have your good father's entire confidence."

"Well, sir, your business with me, if you please. You know the rules of the seminary: I must retire soon," and as Grace spoke, she wondered why in the world Clara Dean did not come. She did not fancy the cold glitter in his eyes; she did not like Abner Denby's quiet, sinister way.

Before the man could reply the door softly opened, and Clara Dean sauntered carelessly into the parlor. She at once started back with well-feigned confusion at the sight of Denby.

"Pardon me, Grace," she said, without a tremor in her voice; "I was looking for you. But I see you have company, and I'll not intrude."

"Oh, no, Clara; you do not intrude; come in," earnestly said Grace, for the brunette acted her part so well, that even Grace herself was deceived.

When Abner Denby saw the beautiful black-haired Clara enter the parlor, an expression of disappointment crept over his face. But as he noted the majestic presence and the ravishing beauty of the girl, those signs of displeasure quickly disappeared.

He arose at once, and advancing hastily extended his hand, and said cordially, yet with his wonted courtier-like respect:

"Surely we are not strangers, Miss Dean? Allow me to say that you are looking famously well."

"Thank you, Mr. Denby; I am quite sure I can say the same of you," replied Clara, half-

stiffly, half-condescendingly. "But," and she glanced at Grace, "I fear that I am intruding. If so I—"

"Oh, no; not in the least, I assure you," interrupted Denby, with one of his most insinuating smiles. "I only wish to see Miss Grayling for a few moments, on a matter of business."

Grace had turned away to conceal a smile; but as she noted the young man's pointed attention to her room-mate, and contrasted it with his haughty deportment toward herself, a frown gathered upon her brow.

They say, that all the world over, women are alike. Grace Grayling did not gainsay the saying. She was not jealous of Abner Denby—of him whom she had sneeringly called *fellow*, who in heart she even now despised; but she was jealous of his manifest preference for the red-cheeked, black-eyed Clara Dean.

As he curtly referred to the business-nature of his visit to her, Grace turned quickly and said:

"Be seated, Clara; you are far from being in the way. Now, Mr. Denby, be so kind as to get through with your business. I need not remind you how late—"

"I have a watch, Miss Grayling, and have but now consulted it," interrupted Abner, in a cold, almost insulting manner.

The hot blood of anger darted into Grace's cheeks.

"Then go on, sir," she said, sternly and pointedly.

Abner Denby had now resumed his seat, out he was nearer to Clara than to Grace. This, too, Grace noted; and for that matter so did Clara. With the latter it was with a triumphant glow in her heart.

"I obey you, Miss Grayling," said Abner, quite unruffled. "By this afternoon's mail I received a letter from your father—my honored employer. The letter was written from Liverpool, a week before he was to sail for home."

"For home!" and a glad cry broke from Grace. Her face, in the twinkling of an eye, was all sunshine and happiness. "Oh, I am so glad!"

Abner Denby's thin lips curled in a cynical smile, as he noted the young girl's beaming joy.

"He was to sail in the City of Chester," he said, after a pause. "That ship is due here to-night or to-morrow morning, but the officials at the company's office think that this fierce storm will—"

At this point he was interrupted by the door suddenly opening. A smart-looking servant girl appeared, and glancing in, said:

"Beg pardon, but madame wishes to see Miss Dean a few moments in her private room."

The maid withdrew, and Clara, with an unconcealed look of disappointment, arose. Bidding Abner Denby a very low but earnest good-night, and with no word at all to Grace, she left the room.

Grace looked annoyed and so did Denby, but he continued:

"Owing to this storm the steamer will most likely be delayed. Your father gave me a little news—only a little—and directed me to hand you as much money as you needed. He also inclosed a letter to you under cover of my envelope. I now have the honor of handing you the letter. I dare say it will give you all the latest news, and also explain why at this time you would specially need money."

The young girl was about tearing open the missive, Abner watching her closely all the time, to see if she would scrutinize the flap; but she paused and thrust the missive in her bosom.

"Thank you for braving this weather and bringing me the letter, Mr. Denby," she said, arising; "but is there anything else?"

"I only wish to hand you some money, Miss Grayling, and to take your receipt for the same," replied Denby, at the same time drawing from his bosom a huge pile of bank-notes. "Tis only business-like, you know," he continued, in an apologetic tone.

"Tis all right, sir; but how much money is there here?" said Grace, taking the notes.

"Just one thousand dollars, Miss Grayling," and he watched her keenly as she passed his lips.

"So much! Why, I cannot use so much! I do not need it."

"You may—after reading your letter," suggested Denby. "However, be so kind as to count the money."

His voice trembled just the slightest, while his eyes rested like those of a hawk upon her.

"Oh, no, there is no necessity," and Grace

stuffed the money in her pocket. "Now I must go; I want to read papa's letter."

"Please sign this paper—the receipt for the money, Miss Grayling. A pencil will do, and here is one."

Grace hastily affixed her signature and turned to go.

But Denby, who was now trembling, despite all he could do, suddenly arose, and laying his hand upon her arm, said:

"I once spoke to you of love, Miss Grayling—yes, more than once, Grace. Your father has—"

"Begone!" and Grace shook his grasp from her. "Begone! leave the house! and never speak again to me of love. I hate you, loathe you!"

Wheeling from him, she fled out of the room, thence up stairs to her chamber.

She did not notice a dark form in the shadows of the passage by the parlor door. Clara Dean had been eavesdropping.

"Good!" she muttered as she in turn hastily mounted the stairs. "She flung him off again!"

Abner Denby's white face was distorted with passion; but dragging on his overcoat and snatching his hat, he strode from the seminary, and entered the bleak, snowy street.

"Furies!" he exclaimed, shaking his hand at the house, "But I will be even with her! Ay, she and her old father shall both suffer for this! Ha, ha!" and he laughed triumphantly. "The receipt business was well managed, and I have a clear five hundred, easily made, to my swelling bank account."

Away down town he paused before a drinking saloon, and glanced at the flashing lights coming from it.

"I seldom indulge!" he ejaculated. "I always like to keep a cool head upon my shoulders. But I can stand a glass or so to-night, and I can afford it!"

He entered the place, and more than an hour passed ere he came out. Buttoning his overcoat around him, he strode on his way down town.

At last he reached the Astor House. As he was passing, a carriage creaked up through the piles of snow and halted before the hotel door.

It was now after midnight. The lights before the entrance of the hotel shone into the carriage, and revealed two men sitting therein.

Abner Denby casually glanced in. He started as if he had seen a ghost.

Then the two passengers descended from the carriage, and entered the hotel.

At the sight of them, Abner Denby uttered a low oath, jerked his hat over his brows, and strode on.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE WITH THE BILLOWS.

THORLE MANTON was, perhaps, nearer the jaws of death than he had ever stood before.

When the sudden attack was made upon him, he had been taken completely unawares. Besides that, he was standing in a position which gave his assailant the advantage by odds. Had it not been for this, the result would not so readily have been reached; for Thorle Manton was a brave man, and in muscular development a very Hercules. For once in his life, too—the first and only time—Margoun, the East Indian, had not been as watchful or as quick as usual.

The excitement of the moment had thrown both the men off their guard; and that moment was the one most opportune for the murderous attempt which was made.

When the young man had been hurled headlong over the bulwarks, the Adriatic was backing her propeller to allow the pilot-boat to sheer off—the pilot, as we have mentioned before, having already clambered to the steamer's decks. This movement of the large ship was a lucky one for Manton; for had the steamer been plunging ahead, he would have been left behind in the dark, icy billows to battle alone, and where no eye could have discovered him.

But he soon recovered from his surprise at the sudden, desperate attack upon him; and as he arose to the surface on the crest of a combing wave, he struck out manfully toward the Adriatic, the skeleton outlines of which he could see dimly towering above him.

Strong man and experienced swimmer as he was, it was hard work against that fierce wind then skimming the maddened sea, and against the terrific wash of the billows. Then, too, the water was like a bath of ice, and it sent a chill through the young man's frame.

Nobly he battled for his life. Now, if never before, it was precious to him. He was jour-

neying home with a fixed purpose in his heart—that purpose lofty and sacred to him, as he, with his ancient family pride, considered it.

But despite his efforts, he saw, with a sickening feeling, that he was slowly but steadily drifting to leeward.

He renewed his efforts; desperately, madly, he fought the treacherous waves which were bearing him away from all hope—away to destruction. His aim was to get alongside the steamer, where he trusted to find a stray hawser trailing overboard. If he was so lucky as to find one, he could seize it, and by his shouts make known the danger with which he was threatened.

As he was now situated, he dared not exhaust his strength by shouting. The chances indeed were that even if he exerted himself in that direction, his cries would be swept away by the wild winds, and would never reach the deck of the steamer.

But every moment he really was drifting further and further away from his last and only hope.

"My God!" he cried. "And is it all to end thus? Am I—Ha!"

At that instant a black body darted rapidly toward him through the seething waves. Another moment and it had reached him.

"Be brave, sahib!" came a cheery, well-known voice. "'Tis I, Margoun. And he will save you, or die in the black waters with you! Be brave, sahib, my master! Quick! your arms around Margoun's neck and—Quick, I say, or all will be lost! Now!"

Thorle Manton, still by an effort supporting himself in the water, waited no longer. He had feared that his extra weight would carry down the Hindoo, and endanger more than ever the lives of both. But as the hot, sharp words of the latter fell upon his ears, he struggled forward and clasped his icy arms around the noble fellow's neck.

Then his head, with its long wet locks floating behind in the water, fell back, and a film came over his eyes. But his hands were gripped in a deathlike clutch.

For a moment the faithful Margoun, under the extra pressure, settled slowly, but in an instant he was on the surface again, as buoyant and as vigorous as ever. Then summoning his energies, he began to swim away with his load. He did not push directly for the steamer, as had been young Manton's tactics, but allowed himself to be swept away by the waves, as he swam directly for the glittering wake left by the Adriatic. This was comparatively easy work, by breasting the bidows and facing the gale. Still it was an ordeal from which many of the hardest would have shrunk.

The tumbling wake was soon reached. There was the steamer dead ahead and gathering speed at every lunge. But Margoun now swam easily. Both the wind and the waves had lost much of their force upon him. More than that, and better than all, there was a kind of suction created by the ship, which aided the East Indian, and that was what the sagacious fellow well knew. He had calculated upon it, and was not disappointed.

After ten minutes vigorous swimming he reached the high stern of the Adriatic. Then by an effort he raised himself until his body was half out of the water and succeeded, at the first attempt, in grasping the starboard rudder-chain. This was a marvelous feat, and one attended with imminent risk; for the ship was lurching heaving and the propeller revolving enough to keep the ship's head steady.

But Margoun had reckoned on every danger; and he avoided all.

Grasping the rudder-chain with both hands, the gallant fellow paused for several moments to recover his strength.

All this time Thorle Manton, wrapped in the unconsciousness of a dead swoon, clung with his icy, gripped fingers around the Hindoo's neck—an extra weight of one hundred and sixty pounds.

But Margoun did not mind this. After he had sufficiently rested he clambered with his living load upon the creaking rudder-chain. Fortunately the ship was set on her course, and no shifting of the wheel was necessary.

The Hindoo did not wait long. Steadying himself as best he could, he glanced above him. A low, subdued cry of joy escaped him as he saw hanging over the bulwarks, in reach of his hands, a large three-inch hawser.

And here again fortune favored the brave fellow; for the rope, from its position, was but partly exposed to the snow and the freezing spray. It was almost dry and afforded a good and ample hand-hold. He therefore firmly grasped the rope.

Now came the sternest trial of all; now came the greatest danger; and now the most desperate strength was required. If Margoun's almost superhuman power should fail, or Thorle Manton's swoon-locked hands should unloose, the sad tale of "all is over!" would soon be told.

For a single minute Margoun hesitated. Then he tried the rope to satisfy himself that it was securely fastened above. On this everything depended.

Holding his breath to retain every particle of his strength, Margoun began the ascent—at first slowly, then rapidly, hand over hand.

The rail was reached; Margoun clambered over it to the deck; and, with his burden, fell upon the sleety boards from sheer exhaustion, but quickly rallied.

Quietly but firmly loosing the almost death-gripped fingers, he arose and looked around him. That portion of the ship was deserted; not a soul could be seen.

Margoun stooped and grasped in his arms the swooning man and hurried away toward the cabin, under the protection of the high bulwarks. He went on the starboard side, and in a few moments descended the companionway to the saloon. The place was now deserted; not even a solitary steward was to be seen.

Still bearing his master, Margoun hurried on and entered young Manton's state-room. He reached it unobserved. Closing the door, he quickly stripped off the icy clothing, and fell to rubbing the young man's face.

In a few moments under this treatment, and under the genial warmth of the room, Manton revived. Then from the liquor-case the Hindoo quickly took a decanter and gently forced his young master to swallow a portion of its contents.

The stimulating draught had a speedy and satisfactory effect; for in a moment Thorle Manton sat up and looked around him. Instantly he flung his arms around the wet form of his preserver, and murmured, in heartfelt gratitude:

"God bless you, Margoun! You, at least, love me!"

"Margoun would die for you, sahib!" was the warm, impulsive answer, as the swarthy-faced Hindoo gazed affectionately at his master. "Did not the sahib once put bread and drink into Margoun's mouth? Did not the sahib once dash aside the blood-stained kreesse and save Margoun's life?"

"Ay! and have you not, dear Margoun, stood a half-score times between my life and sudden death?"

A conversation lasting half an hour ensued between the two, who were so faithful to each other. In the meanwhile Manton had put on dry clothing and was as comfortable as ever.

"Now my storm coat, Margoun," he said, arising. "We have a pilot at last. We'll go on deck again. Keep your eyes open, Margoun, and if you see that wretch who attempted my life to-night, drive your kreesse into his cowardly heart!"

He spoke fiercely.

"Margoun needs no bidding, sahib, was the grim rejoinder, as the dusky speaker's white teeth glittered wolfishly under his long, swart mustache.

"Then come, and—But hold. Did any one see you when you brought me in from the waves?"

"None," was the answer.

"'Tis well. Breathe not a word of this, Margoun."

"Margoun's lips are sealed; but his eyes and ears are open; and his kreesse hungers for blood!" was the low, grim rejoinder.

The two left the saloon, and once again braved the dangers of the slippery, windy deck.

Capt. Stone started when once again he saw his mysterious passenger, accompanied by his strange attendant, standing by his side on the breezy bridge.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Manton," he said, cheerily. "We are all right now; and Captain Kelso here," pointing to the brawny pilot who stood near him, "says he can take us in by eight bells, that is, midnight you know sir."

"Glad indeed to hear it, but, captain, in your ear," and Thorle Manton drew close to the skipper; "is it not customary to have a count made of your passengers before allowing any to go ashore?"

The young man spoke earnestly.

"Certainly, Mr. Manton," was the reply. "We are required—for reasons which will be obvious to you—to count saloon and steerage passengers; also the officers and crew of the ship. Why do you ask, sir?"

"For a reason of my own," was the same curt

answer. "Only I would like to be present when the report is made to you," the young man hastened to add.

"Certainly, Mr. Manton; and it will be made right here. I never leave the bridge until my ship is tied up to her wharf."

"Thank you, captain; then I'll keep you company here some longer."

The Adriatic was now dashing in at a high rate of speed.

We will dwell no further on the rest of her voyage, which had been so tempestuous, but which was destined soon to end in safety to ship and passengers.

Suffice it to say, that just a few moments after her bells had struck eight—or the midnight hour—the gallant steamer, weather-stained and incrustated with ice, was securely tied to her wharf. The pilot had done his work, and had left the bridge; but Captain Stone and Thorle Manton still remained there.

Suddenly they were approached by an officer of the ship.

"Well, purser?" asked the captain.

"I have just finished the count, sir," was the reply.

"Well, sir?"

"All answered to their names, except one of the steerage passengers—a man."

Thorle Manton trembled.

"His name?" asked the skipper.

"MOSES DRISCOLL," was the reply.

A half-hour later, Thorle Manton and his Hindoo servant descended from a carriage before the Astor House and entered the hotel.

Abner Denby hurried on his homeward way. He had been heated by wine, which he had drank at the up-town saloon; but the wintry air had somewhat cooled him, and the sight of the two men whom he had seen in the carriage by the Astor House had completely sobered him.

"Furies! Lost! Lost!" he muttered, as he fiercely smote his gloved hands together and strode on.

On he went, speaking nothing more. He reached his home, and kicking the door almost from its hinges, and leaving it wide open, he burst into the little cosy room wherein we have seen him before.

His mother was fast asleep in a chair.

Striding to her and shaking her rudely, he yelled in her ears:

"Wake up, old woman! Wake up, I say! Are you deaf? Wake up, and hear news!"

He almost hurled her from her seat in his vehemence.

The old woman started, and looked around her in a half-dazed, frightened way; but before she could speak heavy steps echoed in the passageway without, the door was flung open, and a tall man, his garments covered with snow and ice, entered the room.

He was, in the rough, an almost exact counterpart of Abner Denby—the same small, white, square face; the same tawny hair; the same small leaden-hued eyes; the same wicked, blood-thirsty, cunning look.

"Glorious! glorious!" he shouted, without the least word of salutation. "The deed is done! wrongs have been righted; vengeance has been secured, and Thorle Manton, and the memory of his insult, sleep together this night under the waves."

Abner had started as though he had seen a visitor from the other world. The old woman had started to her feet in amazement.

"Moses! Moses, my son!" she exclaimed, tottering forward.

"You lie, Moses Denby!" cried Abner, advancing furiously, his lips white with passion. "I say you lie! You have been cheated! You have failed again! For this night Thorle Manton sleeps beneath the roof of the Astor House!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NEWS!—YOUNG MANTON'S TALE.

THE man who had attempted Thorle Manton's life, and who had been struck to the deck by the vigorous arm of Margoun, the Hindoo, lay for several moments rolling to and fro while the ship lurched, as though the blow had done its work forever.

But under the influence of the raw, cold air, he gradually revived, and struggling up to his knees, grasped the combing of the saloon skylight, and looked around him in the gray darkness.

"By heavens! all is well this time," he muttered, "and no human aid can save him. At last, Thorle Manton, accounts between you and us are squared!—at last a Denby can forget the memory of a lash! But now I must keep myself scarce until the steamer gets in. A search

may be made in case any one should be missing, and I must be away; I would not willingly run afoul of that rascal who accompanies him."

He arose, scrambled down to the waist of the ship and made his way forward, toward the gloomy steerage. Before reaching it, he paused in the dark shadows of the forward starboard gangway, and, crouching down, sunk out of view.

Several hours later, when the ship's sides grated against the wharf, a dark form, unperceived by any one on board, suddenly started into life, took a perilous leap, and landed safe and sound ashore. A moment, and like an evil thing of the night, he slid away in the gloom.

That man was the one who, aboard ship, answered to the name of Moses Driscoll.

The reader knows his real name—knows, too, that the murderous fellow reached his home only to learn from his brother the failure of his bloody mission.

Grace Grayling, her hand upon the letter in her bosom, dashing up-stairs into her room. Hastily flinging the door to, she snatched the letter from her bosom, and drew near a gas-jet. But she hesitated even now. Her cheeks were as pale as ashes, her white brow was wrinkled into an anxious, foreboding frown, and her lips, now shut hard together, were almost bloodless.

"Heaven stand by me!" at last broke from her in an earnest, tremulous whisper, "for I almost shudder to open this letter. Abner Denby has, from my father's letter to him, surmised the contents of this. His haughty effrontery, his quiet, sinister manner, make me fear that something evil is hanging over me—that the sheet inclosed in this envelope, contains something which it will pain my heart to know. But I must look—I must read!"

Slowly she tore open the envelope, and took from it the sheet upon which she had dreaded to look. Slowly she struck it open and began to read; but she could not; she ran her eye rapidly over it, only skimming it to get a quick idea of its brief contents.

Before she had perused a half-dozen lines, she recoiled, gripped the letter in one hand, flung the other over her heart, as though she would stay its tumultuous throbblings, and uttering a low groan staggered backward.

She would have fallen to the floor had it not been for Clara Dean, who at that moment, quietly opened the door and entered the room.

The eavesdropper had been listening at the door for five minutes.

She caught Grace in her arms, and leading her forward placed her in a chair. In the mean time she had carefully scanned the poor girl's face, had read a wretched tale there. A wicked light gleamed in her black eyes, and an expression of triumph swept over her face.

"What is it, Grace—quick, what is it, dear?" she asked, in well-feigned alarm, as she wound her arms about the almost swooning girl.

"Oh, Clara," murmured the poor girl, returning her friend's embrace, vehemently. "I am so glad it is you! Oh, Clara, your surmise has proved true, and— But here, read this cruel, terrible letter, and, oh, righteous Heaven, it is from my father—my father!"

Clara Dean had now just what she wished. She almost snatched the crushed sheet from the trembling fingers that held it to her, and leaving Grace, strode to the burner and glanced like lightning over the sheet; then, as a mocking smile curled her lip, she read aloud the following:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER:
"As I have omitted to write to you for some time, I will drop you a few hasty lines. You must look upon this letter in a business point of view rather than otherwise. I think I last wrote you from Florence; that was several months ago. Well—and I had as well come to the point—many things have happened since then; notably *one event*. I hope that you will not be disquieted at the brief narration of that particular event. In a few words, then, I was married a month ago at the American Legation in the city of Paris."

Clara paused as she read thus far, and cast a rapid glance at Grace, who with head bowed upon her bosom, sat in the chair, wringing her hands and moaning sadly and wearily to herself.

The expression of selfish triumph deepened on the brunette's face; but turning to the letter again, she read on with gloating eyes:

"All I need now say about my new wife is this: she is handsome, stylish, loving, amiable and *young*. She is only twenty-three, while I am sixty."

"Only two years older than you, my darling

Grace!" ejaculated Clara, once more glancing at her friend.

"Go on, read on!" commanded Grace, in a hoarse whisper.

Clara bent over the letter and read:

"Yet that does not matter. No, I am hale and hearty; ay, and I feel as young as ever. You must understand, Grace, once and for all, that I have no apology to make for marrying a lady only two years older than yourself. On that point I have nothing to say now, and you must make no reference to it whatsoever on my return home. To be plain, I will not allow it."

"I write this (and inclose under cover to my confidential clerk, Mr. Denby) just a week before I sail for America. I leave just one week from to-day in the Inman steamer, City of Chester; and my chief object in writing to you is to tell you that, immediately on receipt of my letter you and Clara must pack up at once, settle your bills at the seminary, and hasten to the Grange to be ready for my coming. It strikes me that you two girls have enough education as it is, and it is only a waste of money for you to idle further over your books. I have directed Mr. Denby to hand you as much money as you may need—leaving it to his discretion under the circumstances to determine the amount himself."

"Now, my daughter, a word of advice, kindly meant, before closing. You must accept the new condition of things, and yield a ready acquiescence therein. You must meet and greet your future mother with love and cordiality. You must, by all means in your power, make her stay and future life at the Grange happy and peaceful. I say *must*, and I mean what I say. Until I see you, and with remembrances to Clara, I remain,

"Your father,

"GILBERT GRAYLING."

"The pompous old donkey!" muttered Clara. "And—but here is a postscript. I'll read it."

"P. S. I wish you to have the Grange mansion put in thorough order, so that my new bride can at once enter a comfortable and elegant home. Spare no money to effect that end. Mr. Denby will furnish you with all the funds you may need. By the by, Grace, speaking of Denby, I am reminded that it is full time you should think of getting married. Abner Denby is thrifty, economical and money-making. He is on a large salary, for he is a valuable man to me. Now if he should choose to address you, and I could absolutely satisfy myself as to his honesty and integrity, why he should not be lacking of my sanction in the matter. As to his antecedents, why I would not give that a thought. But I somewhat distrust him—especially of late. Business now should be better than ever; but from his regular reports to me it has fallen off. There may be a leak somewhere, and Abner Denby *may* know something about it, for, though he is a good business man, he is deep enough, I feel assured! More of this, however, at another time. G. G."

"The insuperable old fool!" hissed Clara, between her teeth. "So, so! and if he can only trust Abner Denby, why he doesn't object—"

"Now what do you think of that, Clara?" asked a low voice, as Grace, who in the meantime had risen from her seat and drawn near, laid her hand on her room-mate's shoulder.

"Think!" she sneered. "Only this, that your father will be his own master, and that he does not care the snap of his finger for you. More than all, I think I am a good soothsayer. Perhaps I will—"

She handed back the letter to Grace, paused in her speech, and laughed softly to herself.

"Finish what you were saying, Clara," and Grace's face grew stern and hard.

"I was *thinking* that I might prove a true prophet, in another direction—that was all, Grace!" she said, with a cunning smile.

"In what?"

"In the opinion that Thorle Manton may one day come back to bring trouble to the Grange," was the prompt reply.

Grace caught the full fire, the deep, latent meaning of the glance that accompanied the words; and from that moment she disliked and distrusted Clara Dean.

The drowsy night-clerk at the Astor House rubbed his eyes, and gazed wonderingly at the two late guests, who sought the hospitality of the hotel. But when his gaze fell upon the tall form, the Moorish face and the strange attire of Margoun, the Hindoo, his surprise was heightened, and in an instant he was wide awake.

"Can I serve you, sir—gentlemen?" he asked, respectfully, his gaze still lingering on the East-Indian.

"Yes; give us a comfortable room at your earliest convenience," was young Manton's answer.

"One or two rooms, sir?" and the clerk's gaze wandered back to Margoun, as though he was undecided as to his station.

"One room, with two beds; we are never separated," was the somewhat hasty reply.

"Very good, sir," and the young man picked up a candle and lit it. "I will show you one at

once. But, be so kind as to register," and he pushed the large book toward Manton.

But that gentleman hesitated for a second; then he answered:

"Tis hardly necessary, as we'll only remain over to-morrow. Besides that, my fingers are so numbed with cold, that I could scarcely write. However," he hastened to add, "if you desire it, I will settle the bill in advance!"

"Oh, by no means, sir," answered the courteous clerk, as he caught sight of Thorle Manton's rich attire, for he had unbuttoned his overcoat. "This way, gentlemen."

In a few moments the two were shown into a splendid, genial apartment on the second floor. When the clerk had gone, Thorle Manton turned to Margoun.

"You saw that the trunks were forwarded from the wharf to the express, eh, Margoun?"

"Yes, sahib."

"And the address, as I gave it you, put upon each article?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Very good. Now, Margoun, I seldom drink brandy; but I wish some now. I need it."

"Yes, sahib," and the obedient Hindoo quietly took a decanter from the liquor-case which he had brought along in his hand.

Having swallowed a glass of the rich liquor, young Manton flung aside his overcoat, and, drawing a chair close to the cheerful grate, said hastily:

"I am a man, my friend, who never breaks his word, unless the fiat of Providence intervenes."

"Yes, sahib. Margoun knows it."

"Well, you know it was my intention to remain in Paris this winter, but that we suddenly left that gay city some weeks ago. I then told you that in due time I would give you my reasons for our sudden departure. The time has now come, and I'll keep my word."

"Margoun listens, sahib; but he is sahib's slave; he never asks questions."

"True; but I wish to tell you of this matter, my friend; for it may be that I will need your services—your cool head, your strong arm."

There was an undisguised hiss in his last words.

"Margoun would willingly die for sahib!" was the earnest reply.

He was a striking-looking person—this East-Indian—as now he stood fully revealed in the full glare of the gaslight.

Thorle Manton was a tall man, standing more than six feet high; but Margoun towered fully a half-head above him.

The Hindoo's face, though almost black in color, was lofty and noble in its lineaments. A pair of piercing black eyes gave it a startling vivacity, and a long, coarse-haired, raven-black *moustache* gave him a commanding yet half-wild appearance. This effect was heightened by his long black hair, which, escaping from a white sash bound around his head, swept far down his back. He was clad in a short closely-fitting tunic, or jacket, of dark rich stuff, baggy trousers buckling just below the knee, and cloth *gambadoes* tied around the lower leg with black cords—each article of attire being profusely covered with purple braiding.

"Be seated, Margoun," said Manton, for the other had remained standing. "Time is fleeting, and I will tell you this tale."

Margoun seated himself.

"Well, my friend," began young Manton, "when my good old father died, some ten years ago, I was left his sole heir. Save me, he had neither kith nor kin, and to-day I am the only living representative of his family. He died, leaving a large property, to which I soon succeeded. The property was in money and in a large double estate, known respectively as the Manton Manor, and the Lodge, and both were situated in a quiet secluded part of the country on Lake Ontario—one of our large inland seas, you know. Well, I lived well, and spent much money; for I cannot be parsimonious and niggardly. In due course of time I had run through much of my patrimony, and both of the farms had fallen into neglect. I frankly admit that this was my own fault. Then, too, friends whom I could not refuse, besieged me for loans, and to go security on loans. To make the story shorter, I will say, I speedily found my estate incumbered, and myself heels-over-head in debt. To make matters worse, I was at that time engaged to be married."

A scowl, mingled with an expression of poignant pain, flitted over the dark, handsome face of Manton. But resuming at once, he said:

"Suffice it, that shortly after this I left the country. When far away, Margoun, in a land that you know well, the sad tidings reached my

ears—how, it is needless to tell—that my old Manor home and its outlying acres had been sold to meet my debts. More—that one professing friendship for me, and an affectionate memory of my dead father, had taken advantage of my absence and purchased my dear old home for a mere trifle! Also, that the honored name it had borne for so many years had been changed. Oh! but this was hard to bear. However, with you as my companion, and with almost countless money at my command, I started homeward, intending to remain a year in Europe, then come to this country, and by any means to get back my property. For in the eyes of the law I have a hold upon the purchaser. Only a few weeks ago, while sitting with you in the *café* in Paris, I casually overheard an aristocratic, gray-haired old man boasting to a companion that he was soon to return to this country with a new wife—his main object in hurrying home to purchase the miserable remnant of my once grand estate! Ah! well I knew that man. Well, after a pause, “that man’s name is Gilbert Grayling; and he is in the *Inman* steamer, *City of Chester*, wherever she may be to-night! But, Heaven be thanked, I am here in time to thwart him, to cross swords with him; for, to-morrow—”

Before he could speak further, the East-Indian, suddenly jerking his deadly kreese from his bosom, darted toward one of the windows.

Against that cold pane, a sallow-white, wicked face was pressed.

CHAPTER IX.

MOSES DENBY’S ADVENTURE.

MOSES DENBY—or Driscoll, as he had been known aboard the *Adriatic*, started back in amazement at Abner’s words.

As yet the new-comer, who had been absent from home for more than six months, had greeted neither his brother nor his mother; nor did he do so at all. The few words of Abner Denby, telling the brief tale that the murderous attempt had signally failed, and that Thorle Manton still lived, seemed to root the other in his tracks.

Moses Denby’s white face grew sicklier than ever in hue; his bloodless lips were compressed, and his glittering eyes emitted a snaky fire.

“What do you mean, Abner?” at last he muttered, in a slow, half-dazed way, as if he could not comprehend the meaning of the words which he had just heard.

“Just what I said; Thorle Manton, this very night, is safe beneath the roof of the *Astor House*!”

“Surely you dream, Abner!”

“Dream! Bah! Can I dream, wide awake, and out in such a storm as this? I tell you, man,” and Abner struck the table fiercely with his fist, “I saw Manton, accompanied by a tall, strange-looking man in Oriental attire, alight from a carriage, after twelve o’clock to night, and enter the *Astor House*. I was in ten feet of them.”

Moses Denby was staggered; he could scarcely credit his own senses. Nor would he as yet believe.

“Still you may be mistaken, Abner,” he said. “Five years’ time has changed Thorle Manton, as I—”

“Can I ever forget the face of that man? Bah! no more of this. What I saw, I saw; ay! and the work of vengeance lies still before us!”

Moses slowly flung aside his spray-wet overcoat, and drew a chair close to the stove. For several moments he did not speak; he seemed lost in thought.

“And now your account of the matter, Moses—what have you got to say in explanation?” demanded Abner, roughly, his leaden-hued eyes glaring upon the other.

Moses, turning fiercely, answered:

“None of your domineering around me, Abner! You wear finer clothes than I, and handle more money; but, I’ll not put up with your jaw. Please don’t forget that, in my hands, you are a wisp of straw. Bah! I—”

“I didn’t mean to—”

“Then, too, remember,” interrupted Moses, “what I have done, what I have braved!—that, since I have been tracking that iron-armed fellow, I have carried my life in my hand; while you, dandy that you are—were safe at home, perched on a clerk’s stool, making money—ay, and in your own crooked way, at that. Yes, and all that,” and he laughed maliciously, “when you have a double interest in wishing Thorle Manton out of the way; and I only one.”

Abner recoiled; his habitually pale face flushed with anger. When his brother first turned upon him he had cowered away; for, at heart,

he was a coward. But the latter’s taunt had set in motion his hot blood again. Still he controlled himself; for he knew the temper of Moses; he knew, too, that the latter, though a slender man, had muscles of iron and thews of steel.

“Oh, never mind all that, Moses,” he said, as calmly as he could; “we have worked for a common purpose—you in your way and I in mine. Now tell, how came you, after all, to fail in your mission?”

Moses pondered several moments before he answered. His brow wrinkled and hard lines grew around his mouth.

“You know all about the bad luck in the matter that I met with in Europe,” he said, at length. “All I now have to say is this: this very night when the steamer was far beyond the Hook light, and twenty miles at sea, I watched my opportunity and hurled Thorle Manton overboard. His Hindoo servant knocked me down, and I saw him spring to the rail. Let me tell you that no man could live ten minutes in that sea. It was tremendous! Now, mother, get me something to eat, for I am going out.”

“Going out, Moses? Why—”

“Yes; I shall not close my eyes to-night until they have rested upon Thorle Manton—if he is in the city of New York! Now, quick; some eggs, hot coffee, and bread and butter.”

A half-hour later he left the secluded house and strode away, and ere long was standing on the snow-drifted sidewalk before the *Astor House*.

He glanced around him, and then up at the front of the large hotel. Only one light shone out in the great somber front; it came from two windows of a second-story front room, at the corner of the house. After a moment’s reflection he hastily ascended the steps and entered the hotel, to scan the registry books at the office. The night-clerk was still at his post—and now fast asleep in his chair.

Denby glanced hurriedly around. No one was in sight but the sleeping clerk, and a night-porter who was also soundly locked in the arms of slumber. Moses stealthily drew to the open book, and flashed his eyes down its columns.

A pleased look spread over his face, and a look of triumph beamed in his small eyes.

“As I thought; he is not here; no!” he muttered, turning hurriedly away. In his haste, his feet struck a chair and turned it over.

The noise awakened the clerk. He started up, and seeing Denby, demanded:

“What do you want—what do you wish?”

“I beg pardon,” Moses said, blandly. “I was expecting some friends by the steamer *Adriatic*, just in at a late hour to-night. They were to put up here. Seeing you were asleep, I took the liberty to look over your register. I see they are not here.”

He was turning away; but the clerk responded:

“Two gentlemen came in and took a room not more than a half-hour ago. I dare say they are up yet.”

“Describe them,” and Moses, starting perceptibly, wheeled around.

“One was a tall man whom I at first took to be a negro. He wore a turban, and—”

“And the other?”

“The other was a tall, bronzed-faced, handsome man, with long black hair, a sweeping mustache, haughty manners.”

“It is the right party,” muttered Moses, not knowing what else to say.

“Do you wish to be shown to their room, sir?”

“No, oh, no,” was the hasty rejoinder. “To-morrow will be time enough.”

“Will you leave your name?”

“Tis not necessary. And, come to think of it, please be so kind as not to mention my calling. You see I wish to surprise my friends to-morrow.”

Moses strode from the hotel; but once out on the sidewalk, he looked up again at the windows which a few moments before had attracted his notice. Then he moved off toward the further corner of the hotel, up the street, running his eyes closely over the face of the building.

He was standing by the large spout-pipe of convoluted wire. The spout, at short intervals, was secured in the massive masonry of the house by means of stout metal clamps. To a daring and active man they could afford ample foothold.

Up only twelve feet from the walk ran the cap cornices of the great windows, and but four feet further the lintel course of the second story windows. Upon both cornice and lintel was good standing-room—just the perch for outward

observation of the rooms within. The shrewd and vicious scoundrel saw all this at a glance, and with scarcely a moment’s hesitation, resolved to risk an attempt to at least spy in his enemy’s room.

He grasped the spout, and began the ascent. He was cool, calculating and sure-footed, and soon reached the cornice, from whence he crept slowly onward until he was directly under the window.

Cautiously he drew himself erect, and clutching the projecting sill above his head, raised himself, pressed his cold face against the filmy pane, and peered in.

It was Moses Denby’s sallow-white face which, glued to the cold panes, had met the eyes of Margoun, the Hindoo.

And Moses Denby saw the East-Indian’s quick movement; he saw the deadly kreese flashing in his hand. No time was to be lost; that was certain. So, releasing his hold on the window-sill, he dropped down to the walk below.

An instant and he was buried almost out of sight in the snow, which had drifted high against the side of the building. He was not even stunned by the fall, and was about to arise, when he heard the sash above thrown up by a strong hand; so he lay perfectly still. Lying as he did upon his back, he could see above him. He noted that the bright window was darkened; then he plainly made out that two persons were leaning from the window, glancing up and down the deserted street.

Then the sharp springing of a pistol-lock echoed from above on the snow-thick air; then a hoarse voice muttered:

“By heavens, Magoun! if I can get a sight of the scoundrel, I’ll send a bullet through him!”

Then all was still again.

A few moments later the window was lowered, and the inner blinds closed tightly.

Moses Denby sprang to his feet, and fled away.

When Moses Denby that night left the house, Abner sat for a long time morose and abstracted, as his mother cleared away the things from the second supper which she had cooked.

“Make me a bowl of hot spiced punch, mother,” he at length said. “I shall wait up until Moses returns from that wild-goose chase.”

“Yes, my son,” and the old woman obediently set about to perform the new task imposed upon her, and in a few moments returned from the kitchen with a steaming bowl.

Abner helped himself liberally, and fell to thinking again.

Nearly a half-hour sped by and neither spoke. The old mother was again nodding in her chair, while her son gazed gloomily into the red-mouthed stove. But the latter finally broke the silence.

“That was a strange affair, mother—wake up!” and he frowned. “I was saying that was a strange affair—that love affair, between Thorle Manton and Cynthia Summers! Curses upon him and her!” and he ground his teeth furiously together.

“Very strange, my son,” was the meek reply. “And to think that that heartless jade, after engaging herself to you, should fling you off for—”

“I was not referring to *that*,” he interrupted. “Though if man ever loved woman, I loved Cynthia Summers! But what I meant, was the fact that Cynthia Summers pledged herself to Thorle Manton, that the wedding-day was fixed, that bridegroom and bride, pastor and friends, were present, and yet there was no wedding!”

“Very strange, Abner; and I—”

“One thing is certain,” he unceremoniously interrupted, “Cynthia Summers disappeared from New York that very day; and she has not been seen here since. I did hear a vague rumor, which I never could believe, that Cynthia, on the very afternoon of her expected grand wedding, eloped with some bearded foreign army officer, who was traveling in this country. But—”

The door suddenly opened, and Moses Denby strode into the old house.

“Well, Moses?” demanded Abner.

“Thorle Manton is here!” was the rejoinder. “The water flung up its victim; but, by heavens, I shall not be cheated out of my revenge! Come, we’ll talk. I have my plans already laid.”

“With all my heart!” ejaculated Abner.

The three consulted until the night was nearly spent. When at last they arose to separate, Abner said:

“A famous idea! and I promise that the

money shall not be lacking. But, are you sure about getting the—

"Yes—sure! Money will do wonders. Then I am certain as to what will happen at the station; and it is ten miles or more from there to—well you know where. I dare say the snow is thick there!"

"Yes; and the telegram shall be sent to-morrow," said Abner.

"Then good-night! and dream of good luck," said Moses, turning toward the door.

"Good-night! Where on earth are you going, Moses?" inquired Abner, in astonishment. "Going to attend to my work! 'The early bird,' you know," and this hardy man left the house.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE WING.

On the day following it was soon known in the seminary that Grace Grayling and her roommate were to leave for home.

Good Madame Lefebvre hated much to give up her scholars, inasmuch as they had taken a long course of study, and now lacked only a few months of "graduating"—so called for courtesy's sake. But she could oppose nothing. She simply looked on tearfully, as now and then she ran for a few moments into the girls' room to see them pack their trunks.

By noon the trunks were strapped, madame's tuition bill paid, and the two girls, now students no longer, were ready, in their traveling-dresses, for the journey. They were awaiting with some impatience the coming of Abner Denby, from whom that morning at an early hour they had heard. That individual had written a formal note to the effect that he would call at the seminary and give the maidens any assistance that lay in his power.

Grace and Clara were now anxiously looking for him; for without him they would have no one to attend to their baggage, and no one to escort them to the depot. For this duty, Grace was reluctantly compelled to accept of the clerk's company. But the time flew by; twelve o'clock came, then one; and the dinner-hour at the seminary rolled around. Still Abner Denby had not come.

Yet the girls expected to leave the city on the four o'clock train that afternoon. Grace was anxious to carry out her father's wishes as near to the letter as possible. To that end she wished to get to the distant Grange away up by the lake; and the sooner the better.

Truth was, Grace, almost crushed down and cut to the heart by the unexpected and unwelcome tidings, her father's letter bore, longed now for seclusion. She could find it at the Grange, where she could hide herself from the world.

She passed a sleepless night—that is, what remained of it after she and Clara had gone to bed. And long after the dark-haired brunette had gone to sleep, Grace lay with wide-open eyes, and thought of what she might have to go through with in the near-at-hand future.

Why had not her father written to her before, and at least hinted at his marital intentions? Why did he, an old, man wed a young woman—a girl only two years older than herself? Why did her father prejudge her own conduct in the premises and give her such harsh, stern advice? Did not this young wife give her heart and hand to him simply because he was a rich man? If so, was she not an adventuress? What in life would then be worth the living for, at the Grange? Would not her own heretofore happy and glad existence be henceforth forever dark and dreary?

These thoughts had rapidly revolved through Grace Grayling's distressed bosom; and when at last she sunk into a restless, uneasy slumber, it was nearly day; and she had sobbed herself to sleep.

But now she sat all alone in her dear old room in the broad glare of day, waiting for Abner Denby. For the time she was alone—Clara Dean having just left the room to hold some farewell chats with her schoolmates.

Grace arose and drew near the window, through which in the happy past she had so often looked out at the passing world. The sky was blue and bright; not a cloud floated in the still, cold ether. The storm of the night before had blown itself away; but it left its work behind. Great drifts of snow covered the streets, rendering them almost impassable; and the glistening, sheeny surface showed as far as the eye could reach.

Ten minutes passed—then a quarter of an hour; and Grace still stood by the window looking sadly out. As she gazed, a dreamy, musing expression gradually crept over her face. Her

wrinkled brow smoothed, and her long, silken lashes fringed upon her cheek. She shook her head and murmured softly:

"'Tis very strange! But I cannot keep him out of my mind! I have heard much of his singular history. He has had a checkered life; and, why,"—hesitatingly—"papa, perhaps, did not treat him exactly right, in buying his old estate from him, without letting him know it—and he, poor fellow, so far away!"

She paused abruptly and flung back one of her truant tresses.

"But, pshaw!" she muttered, with a forced laugh, "why should I pity him? Have I not more reason to dislike him? Did he not write papa a very impertinent letter? And if he ever should come back, will he not be our enemy? But," and the dreamy, musing look came again to her face, a hazy light to her eyes, "I can't help thinking about Thorle Manton! What a strange given-name!—Thorle! I wonder—"

"A strange name indeed! THORLE!" said a voice behind her; and Clara Dean quietly closed the door and approached.

"You, Clara!" stammered Grace, in confusion, her cheeks crimsoning.

"Yes; THORLE is a strange name! It smacks of the bleak Norseland. Did you ever read any of the writings of the old Norse Sagas, Grace, dear?"

"No, and I don't care to," was the tart reply.

"Ah? Well, perhaps you would like some dinner; that is more prosaic," and Clara laughed.

"No; I care nothing for that, either. I can't eat, Clara; I feel too sad."

"Very good. But, under all circumstances, I am blessed with a fair appetite. So I'll—"

At that moment the front bell, under a vigorous pull, rung through the grand seminary. A few moments later, a servant announced that Mr. Abner Denby was in the parlor, and would like to see Miss Grayling for a few moments.

Grace's face brightened at the news; this was some relief at least; so she hurried from the room, while Clara Dean ran down-stairs to dinner.

When Grace reached the parlor, Mr. Denby was standing hat in hand by the mantle; and, as if he had entirely forgotten the girl's harsh words to him of the night before, he bowed courteously, and hastened to say:

"Thanks, Miss Grayling, for not keeping me waiting; for I am pressed for time. I would have been here earlier, but I was—"

"No apology is needed, Mr. Denby," interrupted Grace, in a kinder tone than she had ever used to him. "I have made all my preparations."

"Yes; but does not Miss Dean accompany you?" asked Abner, quickly.

"Certainly; her trunk is likewise packed."

"Then it is all right. I have engaged a section for you in the sleeping-coach, have ordered a wagon to carry your luggage to the depot, and a carriage to convey you and Miss Dean to the cars. It will be here at three o'clock sharp, for the streets are almost impassable, and I thought I would not err in the matter of time. I take it for granted that you will leave in the four o'clock express?"

"Yes, Mr. Denby; and I sincerely thank you for your kindness."

"Say nothing of that, Miss Grayling. I will come in the carriage to accompany you to the station, and see you safely aboard the cars."

"You are very kind, sir."

"I beg you not to mention it," and he turned toward the door.

But he suddenly faced her. "You know, Miss Grayling that the snow-storm of last night extended all over the country—especially was it severe in the northern part of this State. Of course—"

"But certainly the trains are not stopped?" interrupted Grace, in some alarm.

"Oh, no. But you know that from Wyndham station to the Grange is nearly fifteen miles."

"Yes; and I shudder at the ride ahead of us in the old, creaky, windy stage-coach."

"The stage-coach is not running. This storm has stopped it for many weeks to come—"

"Not running! How then—"

"I feared this," interrupted the man, with a trace of impatience. "So I telegraphed to the ticket-agent at Wyndham station to find out. He answered, stating what I have just told you."

"Too bad!" muttered Grace. "But how can we get on then?"

"I have arranged all that. I sent a dispatch, to be forwarded by carrier from the station, to your father's old body-servant, Silas Warren,

who has charge of the Grange, instructing him to fix up the family sleigh and meet you at the station."

"Splendid!" exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands. "A sleigh-ride is a novelty to me, nowadays. It will be real jolly. Certainly you are very kind, Mr. Denby."

"Your ride may not be so jolly, Miss Grayling," said Denby, dryly. "That is, if the start—"

He paused suddenly and drew on his gloves.

"What were you saying, sir?" asked Grace, uneasy and anxious at the man's seriousness.

"A slip of the tongue," he answered, with a laugh. "After all, it is only a rumor, and may be as idle as the wind."

"Rumor? what rumor? Do tell me, Mr. Denby," urged Grace.

"I am sorry I referred to it, and for your peace of mind I think I had better not tell you."

"You alarm me, sir. Go on."

"Then it was only this," he answered, with a covert glitter in his small eyes. "'Tis said that of late several daring highway robberies have been committed on the road between Wyndham station and Shoreville, and that road you have to travel to get to the Grange."

"Good heavens! I feel—"

"You may as well dismiss your fears," interrupted Denby, soothingly. "As I said, the rumor, ten to one, is without shadow of foundation—though, truth be told, the winter is a hard one on people without work, and—why—the country up there is lonely and deserted enough. But, with your leave, I must now go."

He lifted his hat, and left the house.

"I have put a flea in her ear," he laughed wickedly, as he went striding down the street. "It is really wonderful what lying will accomplish. It is first-cousin to money!"

That morning, just as the dawn broke, Thorle Manton and Margoun, the Hindoo, were astir. They were soon dressed, performing their toilet by gas-light. They certainly had not slept two hours. Now they arose with a purpose which had been debated before they retired—after Moses Denby's sudden appearance at the window.

"That scoundrel is here, Margoun," said young Manton, as he finished his ablutions, and turned toward his dusky companion. "I am almost convinced that I know his true name. Now, I wish you to creep down before the hotel is astir and measure his track in the snow—measure it accurately, its width and its length. The time may come, shall come, when I will compare it with— But you know all. Hurry away, be quick in your work, and do nothing to attract attention."

"Yes, sahib," and Margoun glided like a cat from the room, and cautiously took his way down-stairs.

Ten minutes later he entered the room, as softly as he had left.

"This is the measurement, sahib," he said, handing the young man a piece of knotted cord. "And here," thrusting his hand into the bosom of his tunic, "is something else. It may tell a tale."

He placed in Thorle Manton's hand a snow-covered pistol.

It was a small but deadly weapon, of the revolver pattern. On the pearl stock was a narrow silver plate, and upon the plate a name was engraved.

Young Manton hastily took the pistol, wiped the snow from the stock and read the name—"MOSES DENBY."

We need not say that Moses Denby did not call that day at the hotel to see his "friends," he was differently occupied. Nor did the clerk refer to the fellow's late visit—if indeed the circumstance had not already passed from his mind.

Thorle Manton only went out twice from the hotel that day. The first time to a gun store on Broadway, not far from the hotel, to purchase a pack of cartridges to fit the pistol which Moses Denby had lost in his fall, and which had strangely come into Thorle Manton's possession. The second time was late that afternoon, when he and the East Indian had entered a carriage and were driven rapidly away.

At three o'clock, sharp, the bell at Madame Lefebvre's seminary sounded through the house.

The carriage for Grace and Clara had arrived, and Abner Denby, true to his word, came in it.

After a brief but hearty hand-shaking, and many sobs from madame, in which Grace joined, they entered. A moment and they were jolting away. The depot was duly reached, and

the girls were soon in the cosy sleeper." Denby handed them their baggage-checks, bade them good-by, wished them a safe journey, and left.

Scarcely had he reached the platform of the station, when a shivering newsboy passed, shouting:

"Extry! extry! Latest edishin! News o' the City o' Chester!"

"Here, boy!" and Abner soon had a paper in his hand.

Glancing over the last edition column, he read the following:

"The *Herald* news yacht just up, and reports the Inman steamer, City of Chester, in the lower bay, making her way slowly up through the ice. She is expected at her wharf at eight or nine o'clock this evening. Like the Adriatic, which arrived late last night, she has encountered heavy winds almost the entire passage."

"Confound it," muttered Abner. "I'll have to meet old Grayling and his young wife at the wharf."

He crushed the paper in his pocket and hurried away. As he strode along he muttered.

So absorbed had Abner been when he read the short paragraph in the newspaper, that he did not notice two men who strode by, so close to him that they brushed against him in the crowd.

Those two men, who, by the by, attracted much attention, were Thorle Manton and Margoun. The former hurried by Denby without paying any heed to him. But the Hindoo's restless eyes soon fell upon the fellow. Instantly he paused and thrust his hand in his bosom. But he quickly shook his head, and hurried on after him whom he so faithfully served.

A moment later the two entered the same coach in which sat Grace Grayling and Clara.

The dusk of the early-evening night was at hand, and the lamps in the comfortable car were already lit.

As young Manton strode by the section allotted to Grace and Clara, the former of the girls was looking out of the filmy window. But the black-eyed Clara was watching every passenger who entered.

As her gaze fell upon the manly form and bronzed face of Thorle Manton, she started as though she had seen an apparition.

"Good heaven!" she ejaculated, in a guarded tone. "So soon! 'Tis Thorle Manton!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG WIFE.

At the same hour, that afternoon, that the train conveying Grace and Clara, and others of our prominent characters thus far introduced, drew out from under the depot, the magnificent steamer City of Chester, of the Inman line, passed in at Sandy Hook, and pushed her way, through the great drifts of floating ice, toward her wished-for haven.

She had been outstripped by the Adriatic, but she had made a good run, after all.

The ice was thick, and she made her onward way with much difficulty, though under a full pressure of steam.

The wind was blowing sharply, and the air was keen and frosty. But the sky was clear, and the sun shone down in all its splendor. So the quarter-deck of the steamer was crowded with passengers, who had braved the cold air to get a view of the city of their destination, the tall spires and gigantic buildings of which could now be seen in the hazy distance.

In that crowd and far forward in an isolated position from the rest, where a good outlook could be had, stood a group of three persons.

One was a remarkably tall old gentleman of at least sixty years of age. His white hair was cropped short; but his equally-white side-whiskers were very luxuriant and well kept. Under the force of the wind, right in the face of which the steamer was moving, they now fell on either side far back over his shoulders. Those whiskers were evidently a feature and a source of jealous pride with the old gentleman, though he had no recourse to artificial means to restore them to their pristine color. They were as white as the drifted snow which marked the distant shores of the bay.

He wore gold-rimmed eye-glasses, dangling from his neck by an elegant chain of gold; and he was clad in rich, though rather obtrusive attire, which would have far better suited a man thirty years his junior.

Hanging confidently upon his arm was a slender lady, well wrapped in costly shawls and furs. She had flung her veil back, so that her face could be seen. A remarkably pretty face at the first glance, with its rosy cheeks, its sparkling pale-blue eyes, its firm rich-cut

mouth, and broad, marble-like brow, overhung with an aureole of light sunny-hued hair.

But when that face was in repose, it was not so attractive; for the rosy cheeks, underneath the mantling color, were wan and haggard; the brow showed wrinkles of deep thought or long suffering; the pale-blue eyes were cold and merciless in expression, and around the curved lips hard lines showed, as though cut by the graver's chisel.

This young woman—for she was certainly in the glad springtide of life—was the old gentleman's wife; and this was their honeymoon.

He was Gilbert Grayling, one of the "merchant princes" of New York. She was the girl who had plighted to him her hand and heart in the indissoluble bonds of wedlock.

Standing stiff and silent behind the newly-wedded pair, a bundle of warm wrappings on her arm, was a spare, gaunt-looking woman of some thirty-five years of age. She had a mass of black hair in which a profusion of red ribbon-bows appeared. Her cheeks were dark olive in hue, sunken and wasted as if from internal fires. The mouth was thin-lipped and stern, and the eyes were black and snaky in their glance.

She was a forbidding, crafty-looking, wicked woman—one who, at a single glance, would throw a person on the defensive, and send a chill of—well, something not exactly definable—through your system. That something, however, was, at least, a vague repulsion, an almost downright repugnance.

That cold, stern-looking woman was the young wife's French maid. Her name was Florine Flavelle; and for a number of years she had been a constant attendant upon the fair young creature who was old Gilbert Grayling's wife.

This party had been the cynosure of all eyes on the steamer. And on this bright, but cold afternoon as they stood on the breezy quarter-deck, more than one wondering glance was cast toward them.

It did, indeed, look as though hoary-headed winter and green-grassed spring had clasped hands. No wonder that many aboard the ship had shrugged their shoulders; no wonder that some had whispered among themselves:

"Poor thing! She has sold herself for money—she has been bought for a price!"

"Are you cold, darling?" whispered the old man, as he noted that a shiver passed over her spare frame.

"No—yes—that is, somewhat," was the abstracted reply. "Here, Florine, fling another shawl over my shoulders, if you please."

"Yes, madame," answered the French maid, with a marked foreign accent, advancing at once and doing her mistress' bidding. Then she retired at once to her former respectful distance.

"Had you not better go below, my dear?" asked Mr. Grayling in a solicitous tone.

"Not for worlds!" was her quick and extravagant answer. "This scenery is grand! The clear blue sky, the gladdening sun, the white-draped shores, the ice-locked waters! Oh, no, I would not miss it for a year of my lifetime!"

She spoke with enthusiasm; but in it was a wild, vehement element which was impressive and unnatural.

Old Gilbert Grayling glanced at her. A passing expression of uneasiness and surprise flitted over his face; for, though his wife had spoken vivaciously and spiritedly, yet her eyes did not light up, nor did a single feature of her face indicate that she felt a word she had uttered.

Gilbert Grayling had noticed this same thing frequently of late; and he had wondered at it at first. Then it set him to pondering; then it gave him some concern. For he remembered to have seen nothing of it, during his four months of courtship. Was she, this blooming young woman, already tired of her wedded life—tired of him?

This reflection had often come to him; he pondered it now on the windy quarter-deck of the ship. But, shaking off these gloomy feelings, he said, with a little laugh:

"Very well, love; you always have your way."

"Ay! and always will," was the prompt, earnest reply. "That is, Gilbert dear, when I am in the right."

She added the last words hastily; for, as she flung her eyes up to his face, she saw that his brow was suddenly knit into a frown.

"Ah! yes, exactly—of course," said the old man, dryly, as he turned away and scanned with vacant gaze the ice-locked, snow-girt horizon bending in the distance.

The young wife noted his meaningless reply; she noted, too, his indifferent manner as he gazed ahead of him. Her eyes suddenly gleam-

ed, and her lips went together like a vice. But she bent her head and said nothing.

Several moments passed in silence, while the steamer slowly picked her way through the thickening ice-fields.

The sun was now slanting rapidly toward the red-rimmed west, and the winter wind grew sharper and more biting every moment.

Old Grayling glanced down at his wife, but he said nothing. The silence between them was getting awkward and unpleasant.

"This is slow work, Gilbert," at length said Mrs. Grayling, glancing over the side of the steamer and noting the tardy progress she was making. "Why in the world doesn't the captain take a tug?"

"Because no tug can work its way to us. Can you see any one in sight?"

Gilbert Grayling had become musing and abstracted. His reply was cold and business-like.

In an instant two bright red spots glowed in his wife's cheeks, and her disengaged hand closed until the tightly-fitting glove burst its fastenings. But, by a desperate effort, controlling herself, she said:

"And when are we expected to reach the wharf, Gilbert?"

"The captain hopes to do so by eight, my dear—not later than nine," answered the old gentleman, his same old kind manner returning.

"I wish we were there now," she said, yearningly. "Though I have sailed the sea oftentimes, this voyage has satisfied me for a long time to come. But, Gilbert, where will you stop to-night in the city?"

"At the Fifth Avenue, darling. I have directed my head clerk to engage for us apartments there. He will meet us at the steamer's wharf."

"I have often heard you speak of this clerk," she pursued, in an interested way. "He must be of much value to you?"

"Yes, love. But of late I have had some doubts as to his honesty," answered the old gentleman, while a frown passed over his face.

"Ah! Then by all means discharge him. But who is he? You have never mentioned his name."

"His name is Abner Denby, and I knew—Ha! what's the matter?" he hurriedly asked, as he felt a violent shiver pass through his wife's frame, and she came near dragging her hand from his arm. At the same moment she pulled her veil before her paling face.

"What's the matter, darling!" repeated the old gentleman, anxiously.

"Only a passing shiver," was the tremulous reply. "I believe, after all, I am not brave enough for this weather. The wind cuts my face like a knife."

She turned partly away; but old Grayling, over whose face rested a stern shade, checked her.

"Did you ever hear of Abner Denby, wife?" he asked, in a low tone.

The slender woman recoiled; but again controlling herself she said, speaking rapidly:

"I believe I have—when I was a school-girl in New York. It strikes me that I have heard a rumor that his father was executed for murder. Yes, I am sure I have."

These words were spoken in a cool, steady voice.

"You are right, my dear," said the old man, in a relieved tone. "But you see," he hastened to add, "that circumstance should not militate against the son, provided he is capable and honest. I took him into my employment, however, chiefly for another reason!"

He laughed jovially.

"And that reason, Gilbert?" she quickly asked, peering at him through her veil.

"Only this: you see when I was a young man—that is considerably younger than I am now," he hastened to say, "why I saw the woman who is now Abner Denby's mother. She was young and handsome, and I fell in love with her; yes, I went so far as to propose to her!"

"Yes, Gilbert—and?"

"She accepted me at once. But I soon learned that she was after my money which I had inherited, and that she didn't care a button for me!"

"The heartless, sordid creature!"

"Exactly. But I broke the engagement, myself, and here, in later years, to soothe the old woman's mind, I gave her son employment."

Another silence ensued.

The sun had now gone down, the air was cold and icy, and most of the passengers had gone below.

"Come, Florine, I'll seek my state-room," said Mrs. Grayling, releasing her husband's arm, and

turning away. "Follow me, I wish to speak with you."

All this time the French maid had stood a silent but not disinterested spectator of what was going on. She had overheard much of the conversation which had passed between the old man and his young wife, and more than once, a cruel, malicious smile had swept over her thin lips.

As Mrs. Grayling spoke, a quick, meaning glance had been exchanged between the two. But the maid simply bowed and followed her mistress to the companionway, down which they soon disappeared from view.

Old Gilbert gazed after them for several moments with a stern, mystified air. Buttoning his overcoat to the chin, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, he strode up and down the now deserted quarter-deck, as if lost in gloomy thought.

"Confound it!" he muttered at last, "I don't like that black-eyed, wide-awake French girl one bit. If I have my say in the matter—and I am under the impression I will—she'll not stay long at the Grange!"

Up and down he strode. Then once again, as he glanced at the bridge ahead of him, on which stood the watchful captain, he muttered:

"Well, I'm not wanted in my state-room, that's certain; so I'll go and have a chat with our good skipper. But," the frown deepening on his face, "does my wife know anything about Abner Denby?—has she ever seen him?—and can it be possible that I, in my old age, have made an ass of myself by drawing a blank in the great marriage lottery?"

Just about eight o'clock that night the City of Chester was made fast to her wharf.

Mr. Grayling, wife and servant hurried ashore. They were met at the gang-plank by Abner Denby, who had a carriage in waiting.

The meeting and greeting between the rich man and his employee was formal and business-like, though they had not met for more than two years.

Mrs. Grayling was closely veiled, though there was no need, for the night was dark and gloomy. But as old Grayling coolly introduced her to Denby, do what she could, she trembled violently.

"I suppose, Mr. Denby, you secured apartments for me at the Fifth Avenue?" asked the rich man, pompously.

"Yes, sir, the best in the house—a parlor and two bedrooms *en suite*, on the second floor," was the almost humble reply.

Mr. Grayling handed his wife and the French maid into the carriage, but before entering himself, he said, in an undertone:

"'Tis early yet; come to my rooms at half-past nine to-night, at the hotel, Mr. Denby. I wish to see you a short while on business."

Denby started slightly at the word *business*; but he replied:

"Certainly, sir. I'll be there."

The carriage creaked away through the snowy streets, and as it jolted along old Gilbert Grayling's young wife murmured to herself:

"He knew me not—he knew me not! 'Tis well—very well!"

The time flew away, and at half-past nine o'clock, promptly, Abner Denby, scrupulously attired, entered the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He had selected the rooms for his employer, and he knew where they were; so he ascended the stairs and turned down the long corridor.

The door to the parlor which he was approaching was partly open. Denby glanced in; he saw two persons sitting there.

He reeled back, and muttered:

"Great God! is *SHE* his wife?"

CHAPTER XII.

MERCHANT AND CLERK—THE STRANGE VIAL.

It was some moments before Denby could control himself. He had certainly been powerfully wrought upon by the sight of some person, whom, through the half-open door of the parlor, he had seen; and that person was Gilbert Grayling's wife.

But she knew that Denby was expected there; her husband had told her as much. And her keen ears had detected a footfall in the passage without. Hastily excusing herself to her husband, she arose.

"Why, my love, you are not in the way," said Mr. Grayling. "You can—"

"Oh, no, Gilbert," she hurriedly interrupted. "Business-talk is dry stuff for me. Then, too, I care not to see Mr. Denby; I should be all the time remembering that his father was hung for murder!"

She hastily retreated to the room adjoining

the parlor, and as the door closed upon her, Abner Denby, after a warning rap, entered the apartment. The young man's face was pale as marble.

Old Grayling glanced at him.

"Why, Mr. Denby, you look as though you had seen a ghost!" he said, in some surprise; for though Abner's face was always white, yet it was never as bloodless as now.

"Oh, 'tis nothing, Mr. Grayling," hastily rejoined Denby. "Only my old complaint—a little heart trouble; I ascended the stairs too rapidly, just now."

"Ah?—yes, I remember. But sit down, man, and take a glass of brandy; genuine Otard. It will do you good."

He pushed the decanter and a glass toward the young man.

Denby for a moment was undecided. He was abashed at this condescension on the part of the "aristocrat." It had never manifested itself before. Bowing low, however, he poured out some of the rich liquor, and in a significant voice, said:

"I drink to your happiness, sir, in your future wedded life!"

He drained the glass and drew a chair close to the table—his lead-blue eyes flashing covertly over Mr. Grayling.

That old gentleman started at Abner's toast, and a slight frown wrinkled his brow. But he grunted:

"Eh?—yes; thanks, Mr. Denby. I daresay I'll be happy; I believe I will; that is, I am quite sure. However, I'll take a swallow of that brandy, myself," and thus stammering, he drew the decanter over and took a drink.

"'Tis a fine article, sir," said Abner, a malicious smile curling his thin lips, a glance of triumph gleaming in his eyes.

"My wife was in here a moment ago," said Mr. Grayling, wiping his lips and paying no heed to Abner's encomium on the brandy. "I wanted her to stay; but she wouldn't. You know she is shy as yet," and the old fellow laughed confidentially. "No wonder; she is still young, quite young."

"Yes, sir, very young—so you condescendingly wrote me."

"And she is afraid of the men," replied Mr. Grayling, still smiling. "But, hang it!" he continued, as a suspicious glitter came to his old eyes, "she wasn't much afraid of them on the steamer—especially of the young ones!"

"But I am only a clerk, sir," put in Abner, meekly, as he smiled covertly at the old gentleman's admission.

"Well, enough of her, just now. I wanted to see you on business, Mr. Denby—to talk about money matters."

"I have my memorandum book, sir, of moneys received and expended," rejoined Abner, drawing from his bosom a stout leather-bound book.

They were soon engaged in a deep and absorbing conversation; for lavish as was Gilbert Grayling, and rich as he was, he was a money-lover.

It was long past ten o'clock before Abner arose and took his hat.

"A moment, Mr. Denby," interrupted Mr. Grayling. "You say that my daughter left the city this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir; I saw her and Miss Dean safely aboard the cars."

"And you furnished Miss Grayling money?"

"Yes, sir—as you directed."

"How much?"

"You did not limit me, sir and thinking, under the circumstances, that a good sum would be needed, why, I handed her from my own funds—it was at night, last night—yes, her receipt calls for a thousand dollars; here it is."

He handed the strip of paper to the old gentleman, who glanced at it, shrugged his shoulders, and muttered:

"Yes, a good sum, indeed! But I can afford it; and I daresay it can be judiciously used in putting the old Grange to rights."

"Of course, sir—easily. But, when do you expect to leave for home, Mr. Grayling?"

The old gentleman pondered for a moment. Then he replied:

"Not for several days yet. I wish to look around the city, and give a glance at business matters. Besides that, I wish the Grange to be in good condition before I get there. I must have comfort."

"By all means, sir. But before I go," continued Abner, as though he had forgotten something, "I would say, Mr. Grayling, that in looking over the books of the house, I have detected some irregularities."

"Ah! you have?" and Grayling, in an in-

stant, was all attention. "In what direction, Mr. Denby?"

"In the matter of delinquent debtors," was the reply. "Only last night I forced a payment of two thousand dollars due the business; and I now beg leave to hand you my individual check for that amount."

As he spoke he drew from his pocket-book a check, filled and signed, and gave it to his employer.

A pleased look spread over Mr. Grayling's face. If he had distrusted Abner Denby before, his confidence in him was now to a great degree restored.

"That's very good, very good, Mr. Denby!" he said, cordially and approvingly. "I'll hand you my check now for the money you advanced Miss Grayling—\$1,000—and to show you my appreciation of your business push, I'll add \$100."

"Oh, thanks, sir, many thanks! I only did my best."

Writing materials were upon the table; and Mr. Grayling soon filled out a check, and gave it to his clerk.

Reiterating his thanks, and bidding the old gentleman good-night, Abner turned away; but as he reached the door, he paused abruptly and said:

"Somebody whom you know, Mr. Grayling, arrived from abroad last night," and he watched the old man's face keenly.

"Some one from abroad? some one I know?" asked Mr. Grayling, in a quick, surprised tone.

"Yes, sir. You know him, or did know him well—Thorle Manton."

"Thorle Manton! The deuce you say!" and the old man almost bounded from his chair.

"I saw him last night enter the Astor House. He must have come in the steamer Adriatic; for she was the only craft that got into port last night."

"Confound it! This is vexatious! Why, do you know, Mr. Denby, that one of my main objects in coming from abroad in mid-winter, was—"

He paused and frowned.

"Was what, sir?"

"Why to repay that reckless young man for the saucy letter he once wrote me. Then, too, the Grange estate would be far more complete with the addition of the Lodge farm. My object was, and, by heavens, is!—to purchase the latter tract."

"Yes, sir, I understand. But I fear you are wearied; so I'll bid you good-night again."

He left the room, closing the door behind him.

When he was alone, Mr. Grayling strode for several moments up and down the soft-carpeted parlor. A frown wrinkled his brow, and an anxious, uneasy expression rested upon his face.

He paused by the table, and helped himself again to the brandy.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "Somehow or another I feel that I am getting into trouble. Thorle Manton back again! And my only hope of getting the Lodge property is that the young fellow is as poor as ever. I dare say he is; he can't keep money. Well, there's some consolation in the fact that Abner Denby is honest, after all! Yes, and with his business tact, and love of money, he may make for Grace as good a husband as she can get. Now I—"

He stopped still, as just then he glanced at the door beyond, which led to his wife's bedroom.

What he saw there caused him to pause and draw back, while an angry scowl came to his brow.

The door was ajar, and the dark, thin face of the French maid, Florine, showed there. It was only for a moment, however, for the door was softly drawn to, and the watchful face disappeared within.

"Confound that girl! I almost hate her!" growled the old man. "She and my wife are far too intimate. One would scarcely take them for mistress and servant! 'Pon my honor, I'll not allow this! But—no; it is plain enough that I am not wanted there."

He dropped into a chair, and leaned his elbows upon the table. He was soon lost in reverie. The moments sped by, and Mr. Grayling began to nod. Then he leaned back and settled himself in his chair. In a few minutes he was asleep.

How long he would have slumbered there would be hard to tell, but when he at last awoke, he did so under a gentle shake of the shoulder, and opened his eyes to see the tall, gaunt form of the French maid standing by him.

"Confound—"

"Madame awaits monsieur," she quietly in-

interrupted. "Does monsieur know that it is past midnight?"

"Moseer be hanged!" grunted the old gentleman, roughly. "I am tired of it. Call me Mr. Grayling, or nothing!"

"Madame awaits Mr. Grayling," she said, in the same quiet tone, as, with a bow, she moved off.

Old Gilbert arose; and as the girl disappeared in the adjoining room, he muttered:

"I love my wife honestly and sincerely; but I wonder if I have not made a fool of myself by marrying her!"

He strode slowly from the parlor to his wife's apartment.

When Abner Denby was out of the hotel he laughed wickedly.

"All right so far!" he muttered striding down the street. "And I made a good thing by being honest! But who would have dreamed that old Grayling had married *her*? I wonder what she'll say when she meets me face to face, as some time or other she must! Well, don't I hate old Grayling all the more for this? Or, ought I to be glad that I, a poor clerk, can twit *her*?"

He hurried on. In due time he reached his home away down-town, where his mother was awaiting him in the little parlor.

"News, mother!" he exclaimed. "Whom do you think old Gilbert Grayling has married?"

"Who—who, my son?" hurriedly asked the old woman, looking at him eagerly.

"You couldn't guess in ten thousand years!"

"Tell me, Abner!"

The young man leaned over and whispered a name in her ear.

Mrs. Denby started as though a bolt from a cloudless sky had crashed into the room.

Early that evening, when Mrs. Grayling had so hurriedly left the parlor, at the approach of Abner Denby, she retired to the nearest room.

It was a gorgeously-furnished apartment. No one was in it, save the young wife. The lights in the rose-colored globes were low. She raised them at once, and, wheeling, glanced in the mirror that was by the tall, richly-carved bedstead.

She started at her own image—at her frightened, staring eyes, at her suddenly white, haggard face.

"Abner Denby! and why has *he* come to haunt me?" she muttered, striking her little white hands fiercely together. "And he, old Gilbert's clerk!—my husband's hired man!" she continued, with a bitter sneer, while with angry, vexatious step, she strode up and down the room. "But will he tell old Grayling his secret, and—*mine*? Dare he?"

She paused suddenly by one of her large trunks. It was unlocked. With a quick movement, she flung up the lid, and dashed her hand down among the garments packed therein. A moment and she took out a good-sized bottle, of gilded cut-glass. It was half filled with a translucent, amber-hued liquor.

"I need a stimulant—and nothing suits me so well as *absinthe*. I have enough of it," and filling a small wine-glass, she drained it at a draught.

"I have work—trouble!—on my hands," she said, hastily replacing the flask and arising. "I must think about it; I must meet it! And I must have help. Where will I get it? From Florine Flavelle, and from my darling husband's well-filled coffers! Florine has a stern will, a strong arm, a steady finger. She has served me well, before—she, and—*what she carries!*"

She paused. A demonic glitter now glared in her pale blue eyes, and an expression of unscrupulous purpose, of fiendish ferocity, settled over the face, which was so beautiful at the first glance.

"Yes!" she exclaimed, in a tone which was harsh and unguarded. "And money will—*ay, must*—stop Abner Denby's mouth! Should it fail, then one drop from Florine's—No! no!" and she abruptly checked herself. "I hope it will not come to that! For already I have enough on my hands to account for! And so has Florine. Yet," and a different train of thought seemed to fill her mind, "I cannot always avoid Abner Denby; the time will come when I must stand with him, face to face!"

She arose, glanced hurriedly toward the door which opened into the parlor, then at another leading to the apartment which adjoined her bedroom.

"I must see Florine," she said, moving hastily toward the last-named door, which she at once opened, and glancing in, said, in a low, cautious voice:

"Florine! Florine! where are you?"

"Here, madame," and the French maid emerged from the shadows—for her room was unlighted—and entering Mrs. Grayling's elegant apartment, bowed low.

"Come, Florine, be seated. I wish to see you on business. Be quiet as the grave, for the sharp-eared old man must not hear."

Florine's thin-cut lips smiled in derision. But she said, very quietly:

"Madame tires of monsieur—of Mr. Grayling."

The lady started.

"I did not say so, Florine."

"I can see it. And no wonder."

"No, wonder, Florine?"

"No wonder, madame," and the girl met her mistress's gaze with unabashed front.

"And why no wonder, Florine?" asked Mrs. Grayling, in a whisper.

"Because monsieur is too old for madame," was the prompt reply. "Monsieur and madame made a laughing-stock for keen-eyed ones on the steamer."

"What!" and a stormy answer was upon the lady's lips. But, checking herself, she continued: "For all that, the old man is rich, is enormously wealthy. 'Twas always my ambition to marry a rich man, though I always failed until—However—"

She paused in some confusion.

"Until madame met monsieur," said Florine, without a quaver in her voice, as though she would complete the lady's unfinished sentence.

"But, madame—"

She in turn paused.

"But what, Florine? Go on."

"Mr. Grayling is rich; yet you can be just as rich as he, and—have a *young* husband, besides."

Florine's black eyes lingered with a deep, significant feeling on her mistress's face.

Mrs. Grayling started violently, and an ashen pallor swept every vestige of blood from her cheeks.

"That is what I wished to see you, to talk with you about, Florine," she at last ejaculated, drawing her chair closer to the maid.

"*Has monsieur made his will?*" queried the latter.

"He has, after much urging on my part—only three nights ago, aboard the steamer. He has signed it; but it has not been witnessed, and may therefore be—"

"That does not matter," interrupted the maid, almost rudely, certainly disrespectfully. "If no other will can be found, this would be accepted. But its provisions, madame—if you know."

"I do know!" was the impulsive reply. "For when the old man was asleep, I took the paper from his pocket and read every word."

"Well, madame?"

"Besides providing for his daughter, and making a few trifling bequests, he leaves the bulk of his great property to me."

"Good, very good!" and Florine's eyes sparkled with an avaricious light. "Then, when madame comes into possession of her property, she will not forget Florine Flavelle who has served her so long and so faithfully?"

"No, no; I forget nobody, nothing," was the rejoinder, a little scowl coming to the face of the speaker.

"And that time may soon come," pursued Florine. "Madame may wish it were here now?"

The words were spoken in a low, startling undertone.

Mrs. Grayling paled again, and for a moment shrunk away as if in terror; but, as the hard lines deepened around her mouth, and the cold, deadly luster shot from her half-closed eyes, she said:

"I have been thinking of it—much! But we must—"

"The work can be easily done," calmly interrupted the other in a hard, stern voice. "I have an abundance of that, which acted so well in the case of the old German baron, who suddenly died at Baden-Baden—of apoplexy, so the doctors *certified!*"

Mrs. Grayling shuddered and placed her hands to her eyes, as though she would shut out some horrid vision.

"See," continued Florine, thrusting her hand into her bosom. "I have an abundance!—more than an abundance—when it takes only a single drop, ay, a half-drop, to—"

She drew out a long, very slender, heavy vial of cut-glass, similar to those containing *attar of roses*, sold in Oriental cities.

"Put it up! put it back, Florine!" hurriedly whispered Mrs. Grayling, shuddering violently

again, as her eyes fell upon the vial. "Come, now, I wish to speak with you about something more: *somebody else is in my way!*"

A long conversation ensued. More than once during its progress, Florine had crept softly to the door and glanced in the parlor. The girl had been detected once, as the reader remembers.

When at last the conversation ended, Mrs. Grayling said:

"Go, Florine, and awaken Mr. Grayling—though I've a strong notion to let him sleep there all night!"

When Mr. Grayling entered the luxurious apartment he scarcely spoke to his wife. He retired at once, and was soon asleep.

"I can compass all the rest now!" muttered the lady, as she arose at last. "All the rest, unless one comes to life—*Thorle Manton!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE SLEEPING-CAR.

THE train conveying Grace and her companion soon left the scenes of bustling city-life, and slid away into the wintry, snow-draped country. The tracks had been cleared and the locomotive dashed along, with its long line of coaches, at its usual rate of speed.

Grace was sad and silent; she paid only passing heed to what was going on around her. She was thinking of Madame Lefebvre's seminary which had so long been such a happy home for her. She was thinking of the warm friends whom she had left behind her, and of the gloomy, dismal old mansion to which she was rapidly hastening. She was contrasting her late life of contentment and freedom from care, with her future existence at the Grange—contrasting the gay city life and the genial comforts of the seminary, with the gloomy wilds, the wintry hills, and frozen lakes of northern New York!

More than all, Grace was pondering the recent news which was the occasion of this journey, and of the sudden sundering of endearing ties.

What would her life now be? Yes, especially as in the last twenty-four hours, she had learned to distrust and to dislike Clara Dean, with whom she had grown up to womanhood! Who was her new mother? Who was she like? How would she act toward her? And Grace only knew one thing of her—that she was two years older than herself!

Thus she sat musing moodily to herself as the iron horse, at every lunge, bore her nearer and nearer to the old house on the distant lake.

Clara Dean was silent; but she was not so abstracted as was her fair-haired companion. Her restless eyes were wide open, and were keenly observing everything that was passing around her. But for the most part, they were bent steadily upon Thorle Manton.

She had met him, casually, some five or six years before, at a ball in New York where she chanced to be visiting. The passing time had not changed him so much, but that she recognized him at the first glance. He was stouter, more bronzed, handsomer—that was all. She knew it was he.

She was undecided what use to make of her information. What she knew—by chance as it were—might be of use to her, provided she kept it for a time, at least, from Grace.

At first she watched him keenly, as though from his conduct toward her she would shape her decision—whether he remembered her or not. That was soon decided positively in the negative.

Thorle Manton, after reaching the section in the "sleeper" assigned to him and the Hindoo, had leisurely thrown aside his overcoat, placed his hat in the rack, and made himself comfortable. As he seated himself, he glanced at the occupants of the car, as much as he could see.

He was facing Clara Dean; but Grace sat *vis-à-vis* with her friend, and the young man saw nothing of her face—only the gorgeous wealth of the sunny hair that sprayed down her back. But he had started slightly as his eyes first fell upon Clara; then he started the more as he noted her earnest, persistent stare. For a moment he swept her face keenly; but shaking his head, he leaned over and whispered something to the dusky Hindoo.

The East Indian turned around carelessly in his seat, and glanced toward the two girls.

When his quiet, burning gaze fell upon her face, so calmly, yet so searchingly, Clara colored viciously, and hastily drew her veil over her face.

But, through the meshes of it, she saw something like a smile flit over the handsome face of Thorle Manton. The girl gripped her hands to-

gether, and uttered a low exclamation of anger.

Her sudden movement had aroused Grace from her reverie; and Clara's muttered words had reached her friend's ears.

"What is it, Clara?" she asked quickly, as she seated herself by the side of her school-mate.

"What is what, Grace?" asked Clara, sternly, her eyes still flashing through her veil at Thorle Manton, around whose lips the cynical smile lingered, as now and then he cast a glance toward her.

"What made you pull down your veil just now—and so abruptly? Certainly you do not wish to wear a veil in the cars! Something has annoyed you, I am certain."

"You have an overplus of curiosity; I am certain of that," was the caustic reply.

"Clara!"

"There, now, don't get into a passion," said Clara; though her tone was far from being humble or conciliatory. "I am vexed!"

"At what?"

"At that impertinent fellow, yonder, who has been staring and leering at me ever since I entered the car," said Clara, making a little motion toward Manton.

For the first time, Grace looked in that direction; for the first time in her life her eyes fell upon Thorle Manton. She started perceptibly, cast her eyes tremblingly down, then she looked up again, and swept the young man's face with a hurried but scrutinizing glance.

Margoun had laid aside his turban, and, half reclining in the seat, did not attract the blonde's notice.

"He is a handsome fellow, at all events!" ejaculated Grace, earnestly and abstractedly. "He is one of the best-looking—"

She suddenly ceased, and as a carnation tinge glowed in her cheek, she once again cast her eyes down.

"Good heavens! snared so soon!" muttered Clara to herself—a bitter, envious feeling suddenly filling her bosom, a vengeful gleam in her eyes.

And no wonder that Clara Dean started—no wonder that a rankling envy filled her bosom. For Thorle Manton had seen Grace Grayling at the moment she looked toward him. His jetty eyes had met hers, and the cynical smile left his lips. A look of admiration gleamed from his very feature; and once again he bent over and spoke to his swarthy companion.

The East-Indian glanced back. As his eyes fell on Grace, her golden hair, her winsome womanly face, he nodded his head approvingly, and in turn spoke something to young Manton.

The latter only smiled—softly and yearningly—and, drawing a magazine from his pocket, turned to the light and prepared to read.

But, Thorle Manton's eyes glanced over the printed columns without taking in the meaning of a single word; his mind was otherwise engaged, his thoughts were wandering in a different direction.

He was thinking of the fair, angel-like face of the young girl before him; and dark thoughts, mingled with those of a brighter hue, were shadowing through his brain.

At that moment the attendant of the "sleepers" made his appearance for the purpose of changing the seats into couches; for the night had now deepened, and the train was far away from the great city, which it had left some hours before.

In a few moments the section assigned to the two girls was arranged for the night, the curtains were closed, and the maidens shut in from view.

Thorle Manton sighed and flung the magazine aside. He could not read. But he had no idea of retiring yet; and so he told the attendant, when that polite official came to the section. Margoun was half dozing; but, every now and then, he opened his eyes and glanced at the man whom he so much loved.

At last young Manton arose.

"I shall smoke a cigar, Margoun," he said. "You need not follow me."

"Yes, sahib," answered the Hindoo, who well understood that the young man wished to be alone; and placing a shawl under his head he leaned back, prepared to await his master's return.

Thorle, balancing himself by the seats, made his way toward the rear of the jolting car, in search of the "smoker's cab." As he passed the closed section wherein was the fair young girl who had so startled him by her beauty, and set in motion such a train of thought in his mind, he involuntarily hesitated. But, as the curtains rustled and swayed under the rapid motion of the car, he hurried on.

He was soon in the little apartment allotted to smokers. The place was empty. Lighting a cigar, he flung himself into a chair, and was soon lost in thought.

An hour passed thus, and he had not spoken, had scarcely changed his position. His half-burned cigar had fallen from his hand unheeded; he seemed to be almost entirely forgetful of his surroundings. At last he aroused himself, and passing his hand over his eyes, glanced about him.

"Strange! passing strange!" he muttered, settling back in his chair, as if he had no idea of going yet. "My heart once loved, in all its fondness, one whom I thought a pure and sinless maiden. Oh, how soon came the dreadful awakening from that blissful day-dream! How soon was that loving heart crushed and scarred—scarred forever, as I thought! Ay! and steel-ed forever against the blandishments of woman-kind! And here is she who basely—"

He ceased his mutterings, and drew from his bosom a small oval-shaped, velvet-covered miniature-case. Springing the lid open, he gazed at the sight revealed.

The light just over his head streamed upon the case. It contained the ivory-type of a beautiful young woman.

For ten minutes Thorle Manton gazed at the almost-speaking face. Then closing the case almost fiercely, he muttered:

"Fate has decreed that we two shall never meet again on earth! My heart's wish, at one time, was to stand with her face to face, to let her know that Thorle Manton had at last conquered! But that is past; my hate has turned to pity; and I have no longer need for this! I'll hurl it away, will cast it out in the snow, and—now—"

He hurriedly arose and approached the door of the car. He opened it, letting the flying snow flash in, and was about to fling the case out. But, as a bitter laugh issued from his compressed lips, he ejaculated:

"No! For six years it has been with me, my constant companion; I'll keep it yet awhile longer. Who knows—"

He paused abruptly, as he closed the car door, and re-entered. The somber shadows which had been clouding his face fled away as if by magic; a glad light glowed in his eyes, and a winning smile of hope parted his lips.

"Can this be true? or am I only dreaming, that my scarred heart is not forever dead?" he murmured. "Who is this fair young creature who has made my pulses, so suddenly, beat as with the rhythm of a new-born life? Can I ever again see her after this night? Or, is she but a fanciful vision floating before me now, only to be gone on the quickly-coming morrow? And I, who, since that fatal afternoon of years ago, have faced the proudest beauties of every land under the sun, and yet was unmoved—can I love again?"

He passed on into the main body of the coach. He soon reached the section. Margoun was lying down; but his eyes opened as Thorle stood over him.

"Come, Margoun," said the young man, hastily; "we'll turn in. We must have some sleep. The station will not be reached until three in the morning. From there to the Lodge is a long, cold ride; we must be prepared for it—only if we can get it, after all!"

The last words were spoken in a low, uneasy tone.

The drowsy attendant soon arranged the section, and young Manton and Margoun retired at once. They both occupied the lower berth—the Hindoo lying on the side next to the aisle.

Thorle Manton was soon asleep.

Not so with Margoun.

Grace Grayling and her companion had gone to bed more than an hour before this. They, too, knew at what time far away, dreary Wyndham station would be reached, and that some sleep was necessary for the long bleak ride in the sleigh which then and there would stretch between them and the Grande.

Grace, as if, for the time, forgetting everything—Abner Denby's startling news of robbers being abroad, her strange emotion at seeing the handsome, bronzed face of the traveler in the coach, everything—had yielded to slumber, and was soon wandering in the bright realms of dreamland, oblivious of what she considered a somber cloud settling about her, in the new life which she was called upon to live.

But Clara Dean was far from being sleepy; her conscience was not easy; and long after Grace was asleep, the girl was wide awake, her busy mind laying plan upon plan for her future action. Her thoughts were bitter enough; for she could not forget the half-contemptuous smile which Thorle Manton had indulged in, at her

expense; nor could she exorcise from her memory his bright, yearning look, as his gaze had rested upon Grace.

She was sorry that she had made the discovery that Thorle Manton, the wanderer in many lands, was indeed in a few feet of her; and she racked her mind to make herself now believe that she was, after all, mistaken.

She lay on the couch, next to the passageway leading through the car. This gave her an easy opportunity to watch, through a crevice in the curtains, every movement of Thorle Manton and his companion.

And this she was very assiduous in doing. She saw the young man rise from his seat, say something to the swarthy personage who accompanied him, and make his way down the aisle. She noted his momentary pause by her section.

She trembled and closed her eyes, fearing that, in a moment of impulse, he might pull aside the curtains, look in, and detect her in the act of watching him.

But she breathed freer as he hurried on. Long and anxiously she awaited his return. More than once she dozed; but awaking again, she would glance through the curtains toward the other section.

At last when Thorle Manton repassed her couch, her eyes fell upon him again; and when he and the Hindoo had retired, and the curtains were dropped before the section, Clara muttered:

"It looks like him! But I must be certain; and come what may, I will! If I do not I cannot sleep a wink to-night. Heaven grant—as matters stand now—I am wrong!"

She lay still—her black eyes constantly peering through the curtain.

The time sped by; the train still thundered on through the stormy night.

At length the curtains by Grace Grayling's section slowly opened, and Clara Dean eased herself out, into the aisle. A shawl was drawn over her head and shoulders, and she was in her stocking-feet.

"If I can get a good look at his face I'll soon be satisfied," she murmured. "If that man is indeed Thorle Manton, he has upon his forehead just above the left brow, a small white scar—a relic no doubt of one of his youthful escapades! But, suppose I should be seen? Good heavens! Yet, nothing ventured, nothing gained! Come what will—"

Steadying herself as best she could, she moved away.

The coach was in silence, for it was now nearly midnight. Even the sleepy attendant, having finished work, was snoring lustily in the smoker's room. No one was in sight; and fortune favored Clara Dean.

A moment and she reached Thorle Manton's section. She paused, and flung a final hasty glance around her. She was trembling in every limb. But she had gone too far to draw back.

Nerving herself for the work before her, she cautiously grasped the curtain, unhooked one of the rings, drew back the screen, and looked in.

The light in the center of the car flashed into the section.

There lay young Manton sleeping quietly, his massy hair swept back from his broad brow, the light fully revealing his face.

Clara bent impulsively over and gazed closely. She started back; an unguarded exclamation broke from her lips, and her eyes glittered like living coals.

"'Tis he!" she muttered. "He has—Ha! good heaven!"

She hurriedly let fall the curtains, and, like a phantom, fled back to her couch.

What had so startled Clara Dean was the fact that as she chanced to glance at the other occupant of the section, Margoun's black eyes were quietly, curiously watching her.

This the bold girl had seen.

CHAPTER XIV.

FACE TO FACE—A PISTOL SHOT.

A LONG and earnest conversation ensued that same night, between Abner Denby and his mother, after the return home of the former. At times it was angry and stormy, for more than once the old woman, driven to desperation by his taunts, and by his domineering way, had made resentful rejoinders. But she soon cowered before him. She knew too well that she was entirely dependent upon him for everything of comfort and of necessity in this life.

It was long after the midnight hour when Mrs. Denby at last, after rubbing her heavy eyes, arose, to replenish the fire with coal. This done, she said:

"I'll make some punch for you now, my son, since you will not go to bed. I can't see what

in the world you want to be sitting up all night for."

"You can't see many things, old woman," was his coarse rejoinder. "But I'll tell you, mother," he continued, in an anxious and milder tone, "I am waiting to hear from Moses; and I am very anxious to hear from him. I want company in my vigils, and nothing is better than a bowl of punch."

The old woman hastened to obey.

Abner bent over his memorandum-book, jotting down figures, and here and there making erasures.

Ten minutes elapsed when Mrs. Denby returned with the punch. As she placed it on the table the door-bell suddenly rung with a clatter through the little house.

Abner sprang to his feet and hastened out. A little half-frozen messenger-boy stood there with a letter.

"A dispatch, sir, for Mr. Abner Denby," he said. "And can't you give a poor boy a few pennies for fetching it? 'Tis awful cold, and I trudged all—"

"Pennies? No, you ragged rascal! You are paid for your work. Off with you!" and Abner, flinging the door to, hurried back into the warm room. Then he hastily tore open the envelope, and taking out the sheet, read:

"All right thus far. Sit up and wait for good news."

"Good!" exclaimed young Denby, with a ferocious glitter in his eyes. "I will sit up! Go to bed, mother!"

Mrs. Denby left the room at once, and the young man, helping himself to the punch, resumed his seat, and took up his memorandum-book.

The moments and the hours sped by; but he did not move from his chair. And when, at last, the night passed, and the dawn of another day showed in the east, Abner Denby was still in his seat, poring over his figures.

Just as the sun climbed above the eastern horizon another ring on the bell startled the house.

It was the same messenger-boy.

Abner snatched the envelope which he carried, and rushed back into the house.

"Now we'll see!" he muttered, trembling from head to foot.

The train reached the far-away Wyndham station, and the girls hastened to alight. As they left the warm comfortable car, each of them glanced toward the section which had been occupied by the bronzed-face stranger and his dusky friend.

The curtains were flung up, and the section was empty! The strangers and their hand luggage had disappeared.

A saddened feeling swept through Grace Grayling's mind as she thought to herself: He has left the train at some station while I slept. Alas! will I ever see him again?

They stepped from the car to the long-deserted platform. It was a dreary place. The storm which had blown itself away in New York city, had only winged its way further northward, for at Wyndham station the snow now was falling in blinding masses.

Grace stepped with a shudder into the snow, and an irrepressible shiver shook her frame, as she glanced around her at the trees clad in their wintry garb, and as the chilling winds blew upon her.

Then the train moved off into the gray gloaming of the night.

At the further end of the platform, a faint light shone from a snow-blurred window. Thither Grace and Clara made their way.

Several minutes before Grace and her companion had finished their preparations for leaving the sleeping-coach, Thorle Manton and the Hindoo were already upon the platform.

"I wonder if the ticket-agent knows me?" the young man muttered, as he made his way through the snow. "Well, it does not matter! Here I am, almost home again."

He and Margoun reached the waiting-room of the station-house. It was warm and cheery under the influence of a stove that was almost red-hot. Only one person besides the two travelers was present—the sleepy agent who had just brought in his signal-lights and was standing by the desk, yawning and waiting to see who had arrived.

"Cold night, my friend," said young Manton, glancing hurriedly at the agent. "Are you acquainted in these parts?" he continued.

"Middling," was the laconic reply, though the sleepy fellow glanced with some surprise at the attire of the East Indian.

"Then perhaps you can tell me how far it is to Manton Manor?" queried Thorle.

"No such place round here," replied the agent.

"Ah? But certainly there was?"

"Yes; 'tis now *Grayling Grange*, though—and owned by a better man than owned the Manor."

"A better man? How so?" queried Thorle.

"Why, I call a man a rascal who would run away from home and not pay his debts. And Thorle Manton did exactly that rascally thing," was the agent's prompt reply.

Thorle Manton's brow wrinkled and his eyes snapped. Margoun made a short step forward. But both the men restrained themselves ere the agent had noticed anything.

"You are right, my friend," said the former, quietly; "that is, provided rumor tells the truth about Thorle Manton. He was a right decent fellow when at Union College; I there knew him very well."

"Maybe—maybe. But why do you ask these questions?" and the agent's eyes wandered inquisitively over the stranger.

"Because, if I can't get to Shoreville to-night, I may have to crave the hospitality of the Manor of the Grange," was the reply.

"But, even if you could get there—yes, and start right away—you couldn't reach the Grange in this weather, till broad daylight. The stage isn't running."

"Confound it! just as I thought and feared!" muttered the young man, angrily. "Now what the deuce is to be done?"

The agent pondered for a moment. But looking up hastily, he said:

"Passengers were expected by this same train for the Grange. The family sleigh is waiting for them behind the station-house, now. It is very roomy and will easily hold two more. Perhaps Miss Grayling won't object to—"

"Miss Grayling!" interrupted young Manton, starting back, while a deathly pallor blanched his cheek.

"Yes—Miss Grayling. She and old Mr. Grayling's ward, Miss Dean, were the passengers that I had the lights out for. And as I was saying, perhaps— Ah! they are coming."

The ticket-agent stepped hastily to the door; and Thorle Manton whispered a few words hurriedly to Margoun, and muttered to himself:

"Is there fate in this?"

Margoun hastily drew the capote of his long overcoat over his head, effectually concealing his turban.

No sooner had he done so than Grace, followed by Clara, each covered with snow entered the room.

Grace started violently as she saw the handsome stranger there; she scarcely heeded his tall, hooded companion. An instant and their eyes met.

A wild thrill shot through Thorle Manton's manly bosom.

Clara Dean did not start at all; she only flung a keen, hurried look over the young man's face, and drew her veil more closely down.

"I was just telling these gentlemen, Miss Grayling," said the agent, with a low bow, "that perhaps you might give them a lift on their way to Shoreville in your sleigh."

"Is it here?" queried Grace.

"Oh, yes, ma'am—right behind the house here. Old man Warren was laid up, so he sent John to drive."

"Yes; very good," and then Grace's eyes wandered again to Thorle Manton.

That young man had now entirely recovered himself.

"If our presence may embarrass you in the least, I beg you by all means to deny us the privilege asked, Miss Grayling—for I believe I have the honor of addressing her."

Thorle Manton bowed low.

"If I can serve you in any way, sir, I will only be too glad," was the reply—the maiden's cheeks tinged slightly. "How far do you go?"

"As far as the Grange will suffice, Miss Grayling; we can manage the rest afoot."

"Then, sir, I'll be happy to accommodate you; and we had better be going. Come, gentlemen; come, Clara," and Grace moved off.

"Will Miss Grayling honor me by taking my arm?" and Thorle stepped hastily forward. "The snow is thick."

"With thanks, sir," and as Grace slid her hand into the loop of his stalwart arm, a feeling she had never before experienced filled her bosom.

With a bow that would have done credit to a courtier, Margoun extended his arm to Clara.

At first, the proud, envious girl drew back; but in an instant she accepted the proffered civility.

As Grace and Manton walked through the

snow, the former started suddenly, and said to him in a confidential whisper:

"I am glad to have your company, sir, for before leaving New York, I heard it rumored that this dreary section of the country was infested with footpads."

Thorle Manton in turn started. But he quietly answered:

"I distrust the rumor; but from whom did you hear it, Miss Grayling?"

"From my father's head-clerk in New York, sir—Mr. Abner Denby."

It was only by a mighty effort that Thorle Manton kept back the violent start which Denby's name threatened to occasion.

"It may be so, Miss Grayling. But," he continued, grimly, "my friend and myself are well prepared."

The sleigh was reached; the ladies were handed in, and tucked securely in with warm robes; then young Manton, whispering a few words to the Hindoo, entered also. Margoun, as he seated himself by his master, quietly opened the bosom of his tunic, and slid his hand in until it rested upon the handle of the deadly kreese.

The snow-covered driver took up the reins, placed his lantern by his side, so that its needed light would gleam ahead, and spoke to the horses. Then the sleigh slid rapidly away.

On they went. Not a word was spoken, save by the driver, who now and then urged his smoking horses through the heavy drifts.

Thorle Manton sat wrapped in his own musings; and they were peculiar enough! Grace Grayling nestled back in her seat, lost for the time in a blissful, wide-awake dream. Clara was stern and moody; and Margoun was, as always, watchful and attentive.

Several miles passed thus, and the bleak, snow-draped country grew lonelier and wilder every moment. At last, more than half the distance to the Grange had been traversed, and the sleigh was now working its laborious way through a narrow defile. The snow reached the bottom of the large cutter.

Hardly had they entered the pass, when from the snowy bushes that fringed the side of the road, three dark forms started into life and rushed upon the sleigh.

The driver was struck from the seat. Then a pistol-shot rung in the air; then another.

The latter was followed by a wild cry and a groan of pain.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NIGHT-ATTACK—OMINOUS MUTTERINGS.

THE ticket-agent at Wyndham station had not noticed that night, as the train came up, that three suspicious-looking men were lounging about the platform. They had kept in the shadows, and had shunned the vicinity of the station-house. Nor had any one else observed them, after the train had arrived and departed.

But they were still lingering in the neighborhood. They saw Thorle Manton and his companion, and they crouched closer in the shadows. When the travelers entered the little house, the prowlers strode to a rear window, in which was a broken pane, and listened.

They heard everything that passed afterward; and before the party had left to take the sleigh the three men sprang down into the snow and hurried away to the snow-draped woods to the rear. They were soon under cover, and sheltered from detection. Pushing on for two hundred yards or more, they soon came upon three shivering horses tethered together.

They lost no time, but were quickly in the saddle. Not until then was a word spoken; and that was by a tall, thin man wrapped in a long overcoat. He seemed to be the leader.

"Come, boys! use your spurs," he said, with a low, wicked laugh. "Now, if never before, the game is mine—ours!"

The riders hurried away as fast as surrounding circumstances would allow.

Their way lay along the snow-covered highway that led to the village of Shoreville, upon the distant borders of Lake Ontario.

By light on the following morning a tall man, solitary and alone, strode upon the platform of Wyndham station, and after a few lusty blows on the door of the little house, succeeded in waking the agent.

"Send that dispatch at once," he said, as the sleepy agent, who also acted as telegraph operator, appeared. "Keep the change for yourself."

He crowded a slip of paper and a bank-note into the man's hand and hurried away.

The half-awake agent paid no heed to his early customer, but shutting the door, to keep out the biting wintry air, returned to the room.

The man who had left the dispatch hurried

down the railroad track, and was soon hidden behind a bend beyond.

He carried his left arm in a rude sling; while across his white, half-muffled face, a long, ghastly knife-cut showed.

"Failed! failed! Curses upon me! upon them! upon him!" he muttered, a wicked oath accompanying his words. "But I know his destination, and my dagger will hold its edge! But now, I must hide until night comes again, then I'll take the back-track!"

He left the railroad and plunged into the gloomy forest.

* The attack upon the sleigh was sudden and determined; but it was not unexpected—certainly not by Thorle Manton. Ever since Grace had mentioned to him her fears at the depot, and gave Abner Denby's name as connected with the report of robbers being abroad, the young man had been thinking about the matter.

In a few whispered words he had put Margoun on his guard when getting into the sleigh. This news imparted by Grace was one of the causes of Thorle's gloomy silence—another being, he did not wish to seem to take advantage of his position and thrust a conversation upon the girls. He could readily imagine why Grace Grayling was exposing herself to such wintry weather to get to her bleak old home; he knew that Gilbert Grayling was returning to his native land, and that he was bringing with him a young wife.

The name of Abner Denby, however, had set the young man to thinking, and he resolved to be on his guard. He felt satisfied that there was something in the report; more than all, he was certain that Abner Denby knew something about it. Then the question occurred to him: what was Denby's motive?

He started suddenly as the answer flashed readily back to him. "Moses Denby is abroad! I am his game!" So he thought; and, with his hand in his bosom, grasping the butt of his pistol, and his eyes now and then glancing around him in the gray darkness, he awaited what the long drive would result in.

When the three ruffians sprung from the bushes and darted upon the sleigh, Thorle Manton, who was seated on the front bench of the vehicle, and facing the girls, sprung to his feet. In an instant he had crowded the girls to the bottom of the sleigh, so as to shield them from harm, and thus interposed his own person between them and the actual danger which presented itself.

Margoun, in the twinkling of an eye, was by his master's side.

A desperate struggle, in the meantime, was going on out by the horses' heads; for John, the driver, was a stalwart fellow, and brave withal. The blow which had hurled him from his seat, had not even stunned him; for he soon struggled to his feet and dashed upon the villains, meeting all three singly. But, the odds were against the brave fellow, and gradually he was beaten back.

"Upon them, Margoun! I'll protect the ladies!" exclaimed young Manton, cocking his pistol.

The Hindoo, with a low cry, leaped from the sleigh and dashed forward.

At that instant, one of the ruffians disengaged himself from the grasp of the heroic driver and rushed toward the sleigh. He held a pistol extended in his hand, as could be seen by the lantern—still unharmed on the driver's seat.

Another moment and the deadly weapon flashed full in Thorle Manton's face. But the bullet flew wide of its mark; for Margoun struck the pistol up. The next instant his long kreese gleamed in the faint light. Then it flashed down like lightning.

A maddened howl of pain followed, for the keen-edged weapon had gashed the would-be murderer's face from cheek-bone to chin.

But the fellow rushed on, made a ferocious stroke with a knife at Thorle Manton, and, seeing his second murderous attempt prove abortive, fled on in the darkness.

Fleeing as had been the fellow in getting by the lantern, his white face, now sprinkled with blood, had been seen by Thorle Manton. Involuntarily he had started; but recovering himself he hastily extended his pistol as the fellow fled by, held it steadily for a moment, and fired.

A second, and another howl of pain broke through the lonely defile; then all was still.

"Curses! I only winged him! I used your own pistol, Moses Denby—not mine!" muttered young Manton, with a hiss, as, in a moment of impulse, he flung the weapon into the bushes, and snatched another from his bosom.

But the object of his wrath was now far away

and out of sight. In fact, the battle was over, and the gallant defenders of the sleigh had won the victory. Reinforced by Margoun, John, the driver, rapidly regained his lost ground. In a moment, the two remaining villains took to their heels, and secured their safety by an ignominious flight.

But both bore away with them marks of the fray, while the assailed had scarcely received a scratch.

All this time Grace crouched, moaning and frightened half to death, in the bottom of the sleigh.

Clara Dean, though of sterner and more resolute disposition, huddled by her side, scarcely less frightened than Grace.

But when the affray was at an end, and the field left in the victors' hands, the grateful blonde hurriedly arose, and in an irrepressible moment flung her warm arms around the snow-covered form of Thorle, and murmured:

"May Heaven bless you, my preserver! You have saved my life!"

And, half-swooning, she buried her head upon his bosom and gave way to a flood of tears.

Thorle Manton, as he felt the lovely burden resting upon him, shook like a wind-blown reed. Never before had he been placed in such an embarrassing position. His cheeks glowed under the pulsing life torrents, and his heart beat with tumultuous throbbings.

But gently disengaging the round arms from his neck, he whispered in her ear:

"Be calm, be calm, Miss Grayling, my dear Miss Grayling," and as he spoke, his strong arm involuntarily tightened around her form. "There is no danger now; the miscreants have fled."

Grace had drawn back when he had called her by an endearing title; her arms dropped quickly by her side, and with a sigh as soft as the cooing of summer winds, she sunk back into the seat.

Thorle Manton tenderly tucked the robes around her, though he let Clara Dean—who in the meantime was seated, a stern, silent looker-on—do that office for herself.

Margoun re-entered the sleigh the exultant John remounted to his place, and the horses moved forward once more.

The night was now almost gone, and the gray twilight of the coming morning gradually lit up the somber woods. As it became lighter the way could be better seen, and the sleigh slid rapidly through the crusted snow.

The storm, in the meantime, had spent itself at last, and the blue vault of heaven gleamed clear, cold, and cloudless.

Just as the sun struggled through the ragged mists on the eastern horizon, the sleigh paused before a large, pretentious but rickety old gate, which opened into a long, snow-covered lawn, bordered upon either side by gaunt, spectral, ice-boughed Lombardy poplars.

The destination of the girls had been reached. All through the drive, not a word had passed between the occupants of the sleigh; but Grace had innocently and confidently nestled close to Thorle Manton, as though she knew that in being near him she had a sure protection. So near, indeed, was she to him, that, unconsciously, she was almost reclining upon him. But when the dawn broke, and she saw her position, she hastily drew away and pulled her veil, closer than ever, over her blushing face.

As John, stiff and chilled through, descended to open the gate, Grace, looking at Manton, said:

"This is the Grange, sir—my home. Can I ask you, and your friend, to enter with us and have breakfast?"

Young Manton started in some surprise; but he hastened to reply:

"No; I must decline; but I most sincerely thank you, Miss Grayling."

"Then, sir, if your destination is the village—Shoreville, you know—why, the sleigh is entirely at your service."

"Oh, many thanks, Miss Grayling; we would not thus intrude upon your generosity. Besides that, my friend and myself can easily make the rest of our journey on foot. The snow is firm, and the weather bracing."

Grace extended her courtesies no further; in fact, Thorle Manton gave her no time. He stepped lightly from the sleigh; and as John returned, the young man, slipping something into the honest driver's hand, said in an undertone:

"You are a brave fellow, John; take this as a small appreciation of your courage. I admire pluck!"

Then turning to Grace, he lifted his hat and said:

"Many thanks for your kindness, Miss Grayling. Can I cherish the hope that we will meet again?"

His last words only reached her ear. Grace blushed deeply; but her veil hid her face.

"Certainly, sir," she said. "I shall be most happy to see you; and so will my father, when he returns."

"Then I will bid you adieu."

He lifted his hat again and was about turning away; but Grace, in a tremulous, half-frightened tone, said:

"Will we not shake hands, sir?"

"Willingly!" and in an instant his glove was off; another, her small hand lay in his sturdy palm.

Then Thorle Manton moved away. He had noticed Clara Dean!

Bowing almost to the ground, the tall, stately Margoun followed his master.

Their way lay down the road in the direction of the lake, the icy surface of which could be seen shimmering in the early sunlight. They soon disappeared from view.

When the sleigh entered the snowy lawn, and pushed on slowly between the rows of gaunt poplars, Grace turned and looked back. Her late companions had gone; and a sigh escaped her bosom.

"You were very bold with that man, just now, Grace," said Clara in a sharp reproving tone.

"I was only grateful," returned Grace.

"And you do not even know the fellow's name!" sneered Clara.

"What care I?"

"Your father might care much!" was Clara's rejoinder.

"Enough of this, Clara Dean," retorted Grace, angrily. "I am my own mistress—certainly so far as you are concerned."

"I meant nothing, by—"

"Then say nothing," was the imperious interruption.

Clara Dean suddenly awakened to the fact, that the heretofore amiable and pliant Grace was not a thing of straw in her hands.

The great, spreading, gloomy old house, soon came in view, at the further end of the grove, and a few moments later, the sleigh stopped before the low, wide doors.

The cutter, with its occupants had been seen; it had been long and anxiously looked for. So, when it stopped at the front, a venerable-looking man, wearing livery, was there. He was accompanied by a spruce-looking old lady—evidently his wife.

"Oh, uncle Silas! I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed Grace; and she leaped from the vehicle, and embraced the old man, as if he had been her father, instead of her father's old and trusted body-servant.

"And I you, Miss Grace; and you, too, Miss Clara," answered the old man, cordially greeting the girl. "Come, Betsy, help the young ladies with their things. You see, Miss Grace," he continued, as, at last, the party entered the house, "I would have gone for you myself; but yesterday I had a right sharp touch of the rheumatics, and I was afraid to—"

"That's all right, uncle Silas; but I hope the old house is warm, and that we can soon have a nice, hot breakfast."

"Yes, indeed, Miss Grace," and Silas smiled kindly as he led the way into a large, gloomy room. A bright fire of coals glowing in the ample grate, gave the apartment cheer and warmth.

"Now, Miss Grace—for I cannot keep it back any longer," he said, turning anxiously toward her. "What in the world brings you home? And so suddenly, too!"

Grace Grayling's brow darkened; but turning her face away, she said:

"Father is on his way back."

"Ah! when did you—"

"More than all, uncle Silas," she hastily interrupted, her eyes dimming with tears, "he will bring with him a new wife—a young wife!"

The old servant recoiled. In an instant his face was grave. He shook his head sadly.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOME AGAIN.

EARLY that morning when the dispatch had been handed to Abner Denby in New York, and when he had read it, he dropped into a chair and gave way to his terrible anger.

It was more than an hour ere he grew calm.

"By the heavens above me, it shall not rest thus!" he exclaimed. "Thorle Manton yet lives; but the hound who stood between me and the

only woman my sordid soul ever loved shall yet die!"

He smoothed out the crushed dispatch and read:

"Failed. Leave for home to-night. Better luck next time. M."

When old Mrs. Denby made her appearance she was roughly made acquainted with the news.

Abner Denby lingered long after he had partaken of breakfast, far longer than was his wont. As usual, his crafty mind was engaged in discussing dark and treacherous plans. For the time he forgot that his long-absent employer was in the city. He would, perhaps, have mused on till dinner time had not the house been suddenly startled by the ringing of the bell.

Hoping that this might be further tidings from Moses, he hurried out to answer the summons himself.

He started back as his eyes fell upon a well-dressed, smart-looking boy, who stood at the door. Abner knew him well enough.

"You, James? What do you want?" he asked hurriedly, an uneasy look spreading over his face.

The boy was a messenger from the great business house of Gilbert Grayling.

"A letter for you, Mr. Denby," answered the lad, with a bow, handing Abner an envelope and taking his leave.

The clerk hastily opened the missive where he stood, and read:

"MR. DENBY:

"Dear Sir:—Pardon me if I express surprise at your absence from business, especially at this time, when you must be aware that I am at the office awaiting your attendance. I have already waited two hours. How much longer must I await your convenience?"

"I have to suggest that the brief examination I have given the books shows leaks that require explanation at your hands; therefore the necessity of your immediate attention to this. Yours,

"GILBERT GRAYLING."

Abner crushed the letter in his bosom and re-entered the house.

"Confound the prying old donkey," he muttered between his teeth. "Been finding leaks, eh? Is luck at last setting against me?"

When he hurried from the house an expression of uneasiness darkened his thin, white face.

The interview which took place that day in the counting-room between Abner Denby and his employer was a long and earnest one. It lasted until a late hour in the afternoon; and when Abner at last left the great business house and strode toward his humble home, he ejaculated:

"Hang it! it can't be helped! He is too keen by half! Do what I can I can only shell out to make good the discrepancies."

Mr. Grayling, on leaving his place of business, entered a carriage in waiting, and was soon on his way to his hotel. Leaning back on the richly upholstered seat, he said dryly:

"I would like to trust Abner Denby, for in that case I could indorse him as a son-in-law. But I have grave misgivings. I dare say I had better make him my private secretary and call him to the Grange. Having him under my eye all the time, I am under the impression—ahem! that I would save money!"

Thorle Manton and Margoun did not proceed far down the road, after taking leave of the occupants of the sleigh. They soon stopped and crouched under the shelter of the fence. From their concealment they watched the sleigh until it reached the old manor-house, and the young ladies had disappeared from view.

"Come, Margoun, we'll go now; and we have not far to walk," said Thorle arising and returning to the road. "Yonder is my old home."

He pointed to the opposite side of the road. In that direction lay a small but dense copse of scrub-oaks. At the first sight nothing resembling a human habitation could be seen; but by close scrutiny, on a second look, the outlines of a quaint-looking old house, situated far back behind the woods, came into view. And this sight of it could only be obtained as, now and then, the ice-locked trees swayed under the morning wind and opened up the vista.

The house, at the least calculation, was a mile and a half from the highway which led on to the neighboring village called Shoreville, nestled on the banks of the great lake.

"That old estate was once joined to the lordly acres of the Grange, Margoun," continued Thorle, in a half-sad tone. "The owner of the latter is now on his way home, to add my old

home to his possessions. But there is a lion in his way, Margoun! And Gilbert Grayling may—"

He stopped abruptly, then continued:

"Follow me, Margoun. The ladies cannot see us now. As yet I would have our whereabouts concealed."

He wheeled and strode back the road in the direction of the gate through which the sleigh had passed a few moments before.

Almost opposite this entrance, across the road, was another gate. It showed marks of decay; it was almost dropping from its rusted hinges. It looked as if it had not swung open for years.

Thorle Manton reached it, kicked away the frozen snow at the bottom and essayed to open it. It yielded readily enough for the latch, long since weak and worm-eaten, fell away; and in a moment the entire rickety structure dropped with a crash upon the snow.

"Wreck and ruin," muttered the young man. "More than five years have fled since last my feet trod through this gate! Come, Margoun; such comforts as I can offer you, my dear fellow, I will do so most cordially."

"Yes, sahib. Margoun is happy wherever the sahib is."

The gate opened directly into the thick copse. At one time a road had led through the woods, for, on either side, the trees were thinned out in a straight line, making a long narrow way. Far down the other end the gabled roof of the old house—the Lodge—from which the estate took its name, could be seen, its snowy top glistening in the morning sun.

The two men strode along. The snow was frozen hard, and offered no obstacle to their progress. At last the woods grew thinner; then Thorle Manton paused as he reached a small open space. Directly before him was an old, singularly-shaped house. It was built of dull-red bricks, now showing in every part the wear and tear of time. It was only two stories in height, and was capped by an old-time "hipped" roofed of the old Dutch style. To one end was an odd-looking addition of more recent date than the original house. It was built likewise of bricks, and was semi-octagonal in shape—each face showing two windows, one above, one below.

A dilapidated fence, patched in many places as the exigencies of the past had required, inclosed the house. Besides the dwelling, there were several other buildings—a stable, a carriage-house, etc. A few pigs and a couple of thin-flanked cows were shivering in the snow by the stable.

Everything bore traces of neglect and poverty; everything was desolation and decay.

Leaning his hands upon the shaking fence, Thorle Manton gazed at the scene of misery before him. His black eyes half-closed, his lips trembled, and a tear coursed slowly down his cheek.

"Though I grew to manhood in what is now called the Grange," he murmured, "I was born here. But, alas! how different now! However," and an exultant laugh escaped him, "I have that now which will soon make this old ruin what it was in the past to me—an Eden of joy and rest. Come, Margoun, we'll enter," he continued aloud.

He pushed open the narrow gate which was swung on strips of leather and strode into the yard.

"No one is to be seen," he muttered, glancing around him. "I wonder if good old Simon and Martha—the aged couple who clung to me and my waning fortunes to the last!—are still in the land of the—"

Just then he was interrupted by a fierce growl, followed by a loud, angry baying. A moment later an immense dog of the mastiff breed bounded from around the house and dashed with bristling back and glistening fangs at the two men.

Margoun stepped back and quietly grasped his kreese. But Thorle Manton stood perfectly still until the enraged animal was within a few feet of him. Then in a quick, sharp tone he cried:

"Samson!"

The dog stopped so suddenly in his headlong course that he came near tumbling over. But, recovering himself, he crouched almost to the snow; and while his large, intelligent eyes were bent upon the young man with a strange, curious look, he crept onward as if waiting for something further.

"Don't you know me Samson!—my dear old fellow!" and Thorle held his hand out.

An instant, and the noble beast sprung forward, leaped upon the young man, licked his

hands and his face, and exhibited unmistakable symptoms of extravagant joy.

"Ah! yes, you know me, my faithful Samson!" ejaculated Thorle, returning the dog's caresses joyfully. "You have not turned your back upon me! But," running his hand over the animal's protruding ribs, "You, too, show rough usage from hard times!"

The party proceeded toward the house. As Thorle neared it and looked up he started as he saw standing in the doorway an aged woman, dressed in cheap clothes, her face bearing a kind, motherly, but now half-startled expression.

As her time-dimmed eyes fell upon the two strangers—when she had been called to the door by the sudden loud baying of the dog—she started back in wonder and alarm. Well might she have been surprised; for Margoun's dusky face, white turban, and strange attire, were objects never seen before in that solitude.

She drew back and was about to close the door; but at that moment her eyes caught sight of a brawny, broad-shouldered young man who just then emerged from the stable. A look of reassurance passed over her face, and she stood still.

"Who are you, and what do you want, gentlemen?" she asked.

"Martha!" exclaimed Thorle Manton, advancing toward her.

The old woman leaned suddenly forward; she flung her spectacles up and rubbed her aged eyes as though she would brighten her vision.

"Who—who—are you, young man?" she gasped, as she slowly descended the steps.

"One who knows you well and loves you much, dear old Martha!"

"Heaven be praised! Heaven be praised! 'tis the dear young master!" and tottering forward, she flung her arms around his neck.

"Yes, Martha!" exclaimed the young man. "I am home again! home to claim what is mine!"

He drew the aged servant to his bosom, as if she was his mother.

"The Lord be praised!" murmured old Martha, giving way to a flood of tears. "Oh, such hard times we have had since you went away, Master Thorle! Nothing to eat, nothing to wear, sickness and—"

"Yes, yes, Martha," he interrupted, kindly. "But all that will be changed in an hour's time. The sun will shine brightly again, and all the rest of your days you shall live in peace and plenty. But, Martha," and his voice sunk as he glanced around him, "where is your good man, old Simon?"

"That's it, Master Thorle!" and the old woman's tears flowed afresh.

"What Martha?"

"Why, Simon is yonder, sir," and she pointed over the broken-down palings of the neglected garden.

Thorle Manton, with a shudder, look in that direction. He sighed as his eyes fell upon an uneven, snow-covered mound under a stunted cedar.

"Dead!" he ejaculated.

"Ay, Master Thorle; dead these three years and more. He took sick, and we had no money to get good victuals, much less a doctor! Me and my boy, Aleck, dug the grave betwixt us, and buried him. For Susan—"

She paused and wrung her hands.

"Yes; and what of Susan?"

"Why, we couldn't keep her; her old mother couldn't find food for her. So the poor gal had to go out as help. She is now in the village."

"She shall be here with you before night," said the young man earnestly and tenderly. "But now, can you get my friend and myself something to eat? Anything will do—a cup of coffee or—"

"Lord bless you, Master Thorle! Coffee hasn't been seen in the Lodge for nigh four years! But if you'll be satisfied with some corn-pone and fried eggs, I'll—"

"Yes, that will do famously. But who is that?" and he looked toward the brawny young man by the stable, who, during this scene, had been staring at the group in wonder and amazement.

"That? Why that's my boy, Aleck, to be sure; he's grown powerful since you went away. Me and him and Samson are all that's left here o' the old family. Come here, Aleck!" she shouted. "This is Master Thorle!"

The young fellow ran over and greeted the master of the Lodge, as though he was one who had come from the grave.

Then all hands entered the old house.

We need not describe the interior of the building, further than to say it was sadly out of repair, that it was filled with great gloomy rooms,

and intersected here and there with dark, ghostly passages.

Whatever it might have been in the past, it was now a more fitting abode for owls and bats than it was for human beings.

An hour later, the young man, Aleck, driving a miserable cart to which was attached a wretched-looking, half-starved horse, left the place, and entered the copse.

He was on his way to the village of Shoreville to lay in supplies and fulfill certain orders given him by his young master.

Thorle Manton, lost in thought, was standing by one of the musty, cobwebbed windows when the dilapidated equipage passed from the inclosure. He sighed sadly, then smiled grimly, and said:

"'Tis wonderful what money will do! But," turning away and walking slowly toward the ample hearth, "what now shall be my course of action? Must I hate Gilbert Grayling as I have been schooling myself to do? Or," and his voice sunk, "shall I admit that, in my callous heart, reins a love for that old man's fair-haired, dove-eyed daughter?"

CHAPTER XVII.

LOST IN THE WOODS—FACE TO FACE.

On the very day of his arrival, Thorle Manton had carpenters, upholsterers and paper-hangers at work repairing his old home. That was a part of Aleck's errand to Shoreville—to summon artisans.

In a few days a marvelous change was perceptible in and around the old house. In the place of want and dilapidation, comfort and plenty were to be seen. Four days after the young master took possession, the old neglected Lodge began to approach its grandeur of the distant past.

The house was cleaned from top to bottom; for old Martha now had an able ally in her buxom daughter, Susan. The walls were scraped and repapered in rich, cheery colors; the floors were scrubbed and new carpets laid. Elegant furniture filled the grand old rooms, and comfort met one on every hand. Then, to put a finishing touch, the entire exterior of the time-stained structure was painted.

It looked as though the magician's wand had passed over the spot.

This much done, the rebuilding of the stable and outhouses, and the purchasing of fresh stock and vehicles, was planned to be attended to during the following week.

Thorle and Margoun had not been beyond the limits of the inclosure since their arrival; though the former had more than once peered long and lingeringly through the dim vista of the bare-armed trees, toward the neighboring Grange.

While all this bustle and preparation were going on at the Lodge, they were scarcely less busy at the Grange. The latter was, indeed, already in splendid condition, compared to the Lodge; still, repairing was going on there in a grand and costly style.

The Grange mansion needs a brief description, so that incidents, soon to follow in our story, may be rightly understood.

It was a large shambling house, built, without any pretense to architectural beauty, of great blocks of gray stone—now covered with the mosses and mold of age. It was square in form, with low, forbidding, overhanging eaves. The windows, set deep in the massive masonry, were narrow and long.

Inside, like the Lodge, it was filled with great, dismal, badly-lighted rooms, and cut by wide, gloomy hallways. Secret passages, and dark, caddy-holes, made another feature peculiar to the house.

On the outside, a narrow veranda, protected by a heavy iron railing, ran around both the first and second stories—of which like the Lodge again, there were only two. From either of the rooms below, or above, easy exit was had by doors, and windows, to this veranda.

On the second day after Grace reached home, a letter, which had been brought by a messenger, from the Shoreville post-office, was handed her. The envelope bore, in the left corner, a pretentious-looking crest printed in colors, and was directed to:

"MISS GRACE GRAYLING,
"of Grayling Grange,
"Shoreville P. O.,
"New York."

Grace knew the flourishing, ornate characters to be her father's: for the first time she was aware that he had reached his native land in safety. A chilling sensation passed through her frame, and a little pang made her bosom ache. The new life, which she so much dreaded, was

now indeed before her; though amid the bustle of preparation going on at the Grange, she had forgotten the occasion of it all.

She and Clara were seated in the large, old-fashioned dining-room, when the letter was received. The latter saw it. She glanced keenly at Grace as she sat musing.

"From your father, I suppose?" she said at length, unable to restrain her curiosity.

"Yes, from him!" and a sigh went out with the words.

"Then why don't you read it?"

Grace flushed; but hastily tearing open the letter, she read this:

"COUNTING ROOM OF G. GRAYLING,
NEW YORK, Tuesday.

"DEAR DAUGHTER:—I arrived, safe and sound, last night. Had a long, tempestuous voyage. Mrs. Grayling stood it well. I write this hasty note to say that I shall remain here a week longer. I find that my business matters need much looking into. I have discovered, and stopped a few leaks already. Upon mature deliberation I have determined to make Mr. Abner Denby—my head clerk, you know—my private secretary, with his headquarters at the Grange. Will leave here a week from to-day, and will reach home early in the evening—Christmas eve. Send the sleigh to the station, for, from present appearances, the snow will last many weeks yet.

"Meet my wife cordially and tenderly.

"Your father,

"GILBERT GRAYLING."

Several days passed; in fact, the day upon which Mr. Grayling was expected home had rolled around. The repairs and preparations at the Grange had been completed, and so far as the interior of the old house was concerned, its appointments were of the richest and costliest kind.

Grace and Clara on that afternoon stood looking out of the open door, their eyes wandering, first over the little copse of wood which was inclosed in the Lodge estate, and then roving toward the frozen lake beyond them, glistening in the bright sun.

The day was clear and balmy, and much warmer than those which had just preceded it. In fact, but for the thick snow which still covered the ground, it resembled in temperature a day in early spring.

"What say you, Grace, to taking a stroll?" suggested Clara, in a low, insinuating tone. "You know we have been cooped up, now, for more than a week? The weather is inviting; and with our thick boots on, we will care nothing for the snow."

The other started, and her cheeks flushed with pleasure at the proposal. She had been on cool terms of late with her black-haired companion; for, as we have mentioned, she had begun to read her true character, and in so far as she did, had lost confidence in her. But the idea of a walk in the balmy, bracing air pleased her.

"I was thinking of the same thing," she replied; "but, father—"

"Oh, you needn't fear on that account," interrupted Clara, with a smile that was half sneer. "He and his new wife will not reach Wyndham station until five o'clock. The train is due there then; and he can't reach the Grange before eight o'clock. We'll be back a long time before that. Come, we may push through yonder snow-covered wood and get a sight of Thorle Manton's precious old mansion, the Lodge."

Grace frowned at the last words. Why had Clara lugged in Thorle Manton's name? she thought. But she answered in a half-peevish tone:

"I care nothing for the Lodge, or for Thorle Manton, either."

"Ah!" with a shrug. "Well, perhaps not; but the old Lodge must look very romantic and picturesque in its drapery of snow. Will you go?"

"Yes," after a pause, "we'll go somewhere—where will be determined when we get into the road. But I must leave directions about supper, and then will get ready."

It was past five o'clock when at last the maidens, arrayed for out-door exercise, issued from the Grange, and tripped lightly over the snow toward the distant gate by the highway. The bracing air filled their lungs, and sent the life-blood tingling to their cheeks.

But neither noticed that a cold, raw wind was beginning to creep over the earth, and an ominous gray-black cloud was rising from the north-west and settling over the lake. They were too much exhilarated for that—certainly this was the case with Grace, for she laughed and chatted as she had not done since she left Madame Lefebre's grand seminary in the metropolis. She was so happy that she even felt in her guileless, forgiving heart that perhaps after all she had misjudged Clara.

But as the two reached the gate a sudden shade came to Grace's brow.

"Do you remember, Clara," she said, in an uneasy voice, "that the night before we left the seminary Mr. Denby gave me some money?"

"Yes: a large sum."

"One thousand dollars—so Mr. Denby said," answered Grace, adding the last words after a pause.

"So he said! Of course he told you the truth. Did you count the money?"

"No, though he requested me to do so."

"Well, then, what about it?" asked Clara, her eyes sweeping over her friend.

"Why this much—and it is enough to trouble me: I can only account for five hundred dollars; and yet more than that is still due for repairs at the Grange. I have now not a penny of what money Mr. Denby gave me. 'Tis very strange."

They had paused by the gate.

Clara Dean pondered. Gradually a singular expression rested upon her face, and a crafty smile flitted near her lips. But, in an instant, assuming a business-way, she said:

"I occupy the same room with you, Grace."

"Certainly; what—"

"Do you suspect me of taking it?" was the almost stern interruption.

"Oh, Clara! that thought was the furthest from my mind."

"Then," answered the other, in a relieved tone, "I can, only in one way, account for your loss."

"And that, Clara?"

"Why, when those murderous ruffians assaulted us in the sleigh, they either managed to rob you, or you lost the money in the snow."

This was a plausible solution of the matter; and so Grace thought. For after a moment's reflection she answered:

"Yes, you must be right, Clara. Of course the money will never be found. But papa is rich, and he can afford to stand the loss."

"Ay! true; yours is a good philosophy, Grace! Mr. Grayling can stand the loss of five hundred dollars much better than I can that of fifteen thousand!"

She spoke bitterly.

"Yes, yes; but let that all go," said Grace, hurriedly. "Now which way will we walk?"

"Let us go through the woods and take a peep at the old Lodge," persisted Clara, glancing through the dismal copse.

"All right; anything for exercise, and to please you. But," and Grace glanced at the now threatening sky, "it looks like it is going to storm; and, yes, see how rapidly it is growing dark."

Clara hesitated, too, as she noted the ominous cloud-bank, the raw, storm-bringing wind and the rapidly-descending darkness. But she only laughed and said:

"We'll be back long before it storms, if it storms at all. Come, I know the way well; and we have not far to go."

Grace was, now, silent and abstracted; but, persuaded against her will, she followed Clara, who strode at once across the road. She soon reached the gate leading into the Lodge estate—or rather where the gate had stood. She paused and laughed.

"The place is in sad need of a master—a rich master! Even the gate which stands between Thorle Manton's property and trespassers is down."

But neither of the girls noted any foot-prints; it was now almost dusk.

Clara, leading the way, entered the gloomy woods. She paused and glanced around to find traces of the old road that led to the Lodge; but it was too dark now for the opening vista in the trees to mark the way.

"We had better go back, Clara," whispered Grace, in a frightened tone. "This is nothing but a wild-goose chase. We'll only get lost; and I am already chilled through. Come."

"No, no; 'tis only fifteen minutes' walk, and I can find the way."

Clara, as though she would not be thwarted, plunged into the forest. Grace, already frightened, followed after her, not knowing what better to do; and at every step over the ghastly snow her heart sunk more and more within her.

Clara strode on. But she had made a grievous mistake at the very beginning. She had not entered the road at all! But she was, step by step, penetrating the darkest portion of the dismal copse.

Ten, fifteen minutes, then a half-hour, passed thus; and yet the quaint old Lodge did not come in sight.

Suddenly Grace started.

"Oh, Clara," she cried, in alarm. "'Tis snowing, and snowing fast!"

"Sure enough it is!" muttered the resolute brunette, her tone for the first time showing fear. She paused and looked shudderingly around her.

"Oh, what shall we do Clara?" moaned Grace, her weaker and more womanly nature at last giving way.

"Do! We must get back to the highway; and as soon as we can."

She turned in her tracks and began to pick her way through the cold, tangled woods. But this was no easy matter. Chilled through and through and bitterly repenting this adventure, Grace followed on as well as she could.

It was now dark; not a trace of light penetrated the dreary copse. What was worse, a raging snow-storm was whirling through the air.

Clara had made a mistake at the beginning; she now made another; she was going straight from the wished-for highway.

And thus the two floundered along. An hour passed, and worn out, frightened almost to death, and further from the highway than ever, they paused again. Grace, with a moan of despair, sunk upon the snow at the foot of a tree.

"Oh, Clara, what, oh, what shall we do?" she wailed. "And papa—"

"We must shout for help!" interrupted Clara, in a tremulous tone.

Then she lifted her voice, and sent forth a loud, ringing halloo. It echoed through the woods; but it brought back no answer of cheer.

Again and again Clara shouted. At last the far-away baying of a watch-dog boomed through the copse.

Clara was encouraged. She shouted again and again; the baying of the dog came constantly in response.

Then there was a silence, and though Clara continued to cry aloud for help she heard the dog no more.

Almost mad with fear, she crouched by the side of her friend, and gave herself up to despair.

But in a few moments a loud rustling was heard beyond in the ice-clad bushes, and a second later a large dog bounded to the spot.

Both girls shrieked with terror, and cowered away. And then a loud, manly voice, which Grace and Clara recognized with mingled emotions, broke cheerily on the air.

"Don't be alarmed; he will not hurt you! Behave yourself, Samson! I am coming!" and a tall, well-clad man rushed upon the scene.

"Oh, sir! we know you!" wailed Grace, struggling to her feet and clutching him tightly.

"And, Heaven be praised; for we are lost!"

"You, Miss Grayling! and in such weather?" and Thorle Manton—for it was he—recoiled in amazement; though a heavenly thrill flashed through his bosom as he felt the girl's arms encircling him.

"Yes, sir—and my friend, Miss Dean, is with me. Oh, take us back to the Grange. But, alas, I have not strength to walk there."

"There is no need; you can go to my—"

He paused, but quickly continued:

"Take the dog by the collar, and keep him with you. When he hears my whistle, he will bark. I live—for the present—not far from here. I'll hurry away and get a vehicle."

Before the girls could say a word, or object, he had taken off his overcoat, flung it over them and hurried away.

Clara who seemed to keep her wits about her, grasped the dog by the collar. The sagacious animal at once crouched between the girls; though his ears were cocked, and his eyes were bent in the direction in which his master had gone.

Twenty minutes elapsed, but it seemed so many days to the maidens. Then the faint creaking of wheels was heard, and soon a sharp, shrill whistle echoed through the woods.

The dog struggled up, and sent forth a loud bark.

A few moments later the young man pushed his way through the bushes and stood by the girls again.

"All right," he said, cheerily. "You are more frightened than hurt. But, come; my carriage—such as it is—is in the road, only a few rods away. I will see you in it, and accompany you to the Grange."

"Oh! how can we ever thank you, sir?" murmured Grace.

"By not mentioning it."

With Grace and Clara hanging on his arm, he made his way to the road. There stood an old, creaking, dilapidated vehicle of the barouche pattern. To it were hitched two thin, bony horses. A driver was on the box.

"A sorry affair," said the young man, with a laugh. "But it will answer, I hope."

He handed the girls in; then stepping to the driver he said, in an undertone:

"Can you find the way, Aleck?"

"Easily, sir."

"Then, don't call me by name."

"No, sir."

"Drive to Grayling Grange," said Thorle, aloud, and he returned and entered the carriage.

The vehicle creaked away. The highway was reached, the road was crossed, and the carriage drew slowly into the long grove leading up to the Grange.

At last it paused before the door. A large sleigh was just gliding away from the spot. The door was open, and lights were flashing in the mansion.

Young Manton assisted Grace and Clara from the rickety vehicle, and giving each an arm, entered the house.

Standing in the wide, brilliantly-lighted hallway was Mr. Grayling; near him, in the midst of a bevy of bustling servants, stood the "aristocrat's" young wife.

The millionaire started as he saw his daughter and Clara. An angry, half-uneasy frown was upon his face.

"What does this mean, Grace? What in the world—Hal good heavens! Thorle Manton!"

At that name the young wife turned suddenly.

An instant, and her cheeks were whiter than marble, and ghastlier than those of a corpse.

Thorle Manton saw her; and reeling back, he bowed low and left the house. As he entered the carriage he muttered, with a groan:

"CYNTHIA SUMMERS!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SHADOW IN THE CORRIDOR.

FORTUNATELY for her, and for the strange secret which Cynthia Grayling held in her bosom, her perturbed manner, and her paling cheeks, had been observed by no one, save Thorle Manton himself.

With a hasty, imperious gesture she bade old Betsy show her her chamber, and beckoning to Florine, she hurried away at once. She had not even waited to be introduced to Grace or Clara!

At all this Gilbert Grayling wondered; he frowned too. But greeting his daughter with a cold, formal kiss, and Clara with a still colder shake of the hand, he said, apologetically:

"She is tired, and she wishes to change her snow-draggled garments; but you will see her at the supper-table, when she'll be herself."

With this, and scarcely having returned the respectful salutations of the servants, he followed after his wife.

Grace, for several moments, stood like one dumbfounded. And so this gallant, bronze-cheeked, sad-faced young man was Thorle Manton! And then it occurred to her: why didn't I suspect—yes—know it before? Then the secret of her bosom came to her with startling intensity—that, despite family antagonisms, she loved Thorle Manton!

This surprise was enough; but, in addition to that, in a fleeting moment, in the very drawing of a breath, she almost hated her step-mother. At the first glance Grace could not tell which was her father's new wife; for she knew nothing of the French maid, and she had not expected to see her. But the lady's haughty manner had quickly settled all doubts on that point.

With a sad heart, Grace was about to ascend the broad stairs to her room, which was on the second floor, and looked toward the broad lake; but, at that moment, her father re-entered the hallway.

A frown seamed his brow, and a stern expression showed near his lips. It was plain that he was not wanted in his wife's room, and that he had been told as much.

"How came you to be in company with that fellow, Thorle Manton, to-night, Grace?" he asked, rudely.

The girl's face tingled, and her cheeks flushed resentfully at the word *fellow*, spoken so contemptuously by her father; before she could restrain herself she answered with warmth:

"He is a very courteous gentleman, papa. I feel deeply indebted to him; you should feel the same."

"Ah! indeed? But tell me how you came to be in his company? I had no idea that the fellow had returned. What can it portend?"

His last words, uttered in an uneasy, musing undertone, did not reach Grace's ears. She proceeded at once to tell him the thrilling experience which she and Clara had met with in the copes upon the Lodge estate. She dwelt particularly on the chivalrous kindness extended them by Thorle Manton.

"This is a strange business, anyway!" ejaculated the old gentleman, sternly, as Grace finished her recital. "What the deuce prompted you and Clara to go out in such wintry weather—especially, to go prowling through the woods on the Lodge estate? However," he continued, hastily, as his eagle eyes flashed over his daughter's face, "did you ever see this fellow before? Were you ever thrown in contact with him before to-night?"

Grace blushed and hesitated ere she answered. But, while her eyes sought the floor, she replied:

"Yes, papa, once."

"When? Under what circumstances?"

Grace proceeded to tell him of the arrival at Wyndham station, and Manton's request to be allowed a seat in the sleigh.

"Did you grant his request?"

"Yes, papa," was the frank reply, "and it turned out well that he was along, papa; for—"

She then told him of the attack on the sleigh.

Mr. Grayling was amazed; for several moments he said nothing. But as Grace once more turned away, he suddenly said:

"I wish you to have nothing to do with that fellow, my child. He fancies that he has cause to dislike me; I know that I have cause to dislike him. He is playing a deep game; he is after you; I see it all. But, he is a reckless, good-for-nothing, penniless fellow; and I will not allow—"

"Penniless!" interrupted Grace, resentfully, though a deep blush had stained her cheeks at her father's preceding words. "If report speaks the truth, Thorle Manton is a wealthy man."

Old Gilbert started violently.

"What—do you mean?" he gasped.

"This: Clara read to me an extract from a French paper of recent date. It chronicled the arrival in Paris of Mr. Manton and his Hindoo attendant. The article stated that Mr. Manton was fabulously rich."

Gilbert Grayling recoiled; he could scarcely credit his own ears.

Grace gathered her draggled skirts about her, and, brushing by him, ascended the old-fashioned stairs.

Clara Dean, who had been a silent observer, and a listener too during this scene, followed her friend.

"Strange things are happening!" hissed the old gentleman, when he was alone. "Thorle Manton back again! and rich! Ay! and thrown face to face with my daughter! Confound it, does Grace care anything for him? Then, too, my wife bothers and annoys me. 'Pon my soul, I believe she is tired of me! Why did she hurry away just now? Can it be possible that she and Thorle Manton have—"

Muttering thus, the rich man opened a door to his left and entered the large sitting-room of the mansion.

When Grace reached her room she flung the door to, and, turning eagerly to her companion, said:

"Who would have thought that gallant young gentleman was Thorle Manton, Clara?"

"I knew it all the time," replied Clara. "I recognized him the moment he entered the car at New York."

"Then, why in the world did you not tell me?" demanded Grace, haughtily.

"Because I wished to see what effect your father's foe would have upon such a tender, susceptible creature as yourself," was the prompt reply. "I have seen enough."

Grace flushed to crimson, but turning away, without reply, she began to remove her wet clothes. Her distrust of her companion had returned to her—and with tenfold force.

In due time supper—a late one—was announced. Grace and Clara hastened downstairs. When they reached the supper-room Mr. Grayling was already waiting, impatiently there; for the long, cold ride had sharpened his appetite. Mrs. Grayling did not make her appearance for ten minutes.

At last, the rustling of dresses was heard in the hall, and the door opened. The grand lady swept like a queen into the room. She was preceded by old Aunt Betsy, bowing humbly to her new mistress, while behind, bringing up the rear, stalked Florine, the French maid.

Mrs. Grayling was attired faultlessly; her lovely hair was scrupulously arranged, and her tall, slender figure showed to marked advantage. But, to say nothing of the diamonds that flashed profusely upon her, nature had had many artificial accessories in her "make-up." And these the haughty woman had received at the hands of Florine Flavelle.

Old Grayling introduced Grace and Clara, while he forced a soft, insinuating smile to his lips. The former advanced, and, in as cordial

a manner as she could assume, greeted her new mother. She leaned over to kiss her; but the lady turned her cheek coldly to her, and said:

"Glad to meet you, Miss Grayling."

Grace shivered; but she replied:

"I hope your stay at the Grange will be a pleasant one, mother."

"I doubt it not; but, for heaven's sake, don't mother me! I am Mrs. Grayling."

Grace colored, and retreated to her seat.

Clara was about to advance, too, and greet the new-comer with a kiss of welcome; but, as she saw the cool reception accorded Grace, she checked herself, and made a formal bow.

The two women's eyes met. They understood each other's nature in an instant. With them it was the upper and nether millstone—the flint and the steel.

Supper proceeded—the French maid taking her station behind her mistress's chair, and attending on her alone—a procedure which sadly puzzled and disquieted old Betsy.

As they sat at the table Mrs. Grayling looked more like Grace's sister than she did the wife of the young girl's father.

Despite Old Grayling's honest, well-meant efforts to the contrary, the meal passed in silence; and when it was over Mrs. Grayling, without a word, arose and left the room, closely followed by Florine.

The old gentleman looked worried; what was more, he was angry.

Clara and Grace ascended to their room. They were tired and sleepy; besides that, they were company for no one—not even for themselves. Grace sighed, when once in her quaint old chamber; she knew that her future life at the Grange would be one of misery to her. How she longed for the glad, happy days of the past to come again! How she longed for the sheltering roof of the seminary, and for the motherly tenderne s of good Madame Lefebvre again!

Mr. Grayling lingered for some time in the supper-room, lost in thought; nor did he leave until Florine quietly entered to get her own meal.

"Madame is in the sitting-room," she said, quietly, seating herself at the table, and casting a glance at the viands.

With a wrinkled brow the old gentleman strode out and made his way to the sitting-room. Though he knew that she was there, he started as he saw his wife seated close by the grate, her eyes bent upon the glowing coals.

"What is the matter, Cynthia?" he asked, solicitously, though he could not banish a trace of annoyance from his tones. "I fear you are not well."

A slight trembling pervaded the woman's frame at his abrupt question; but it was only momentary.

"Well? I never was better in my life; I am only tired now."

"Then, my dear, you had better go to bed. Your room is prepared for—"

"Not for worlds!" she interrupted, with a laugh, though her words were none the less earnest. "I have business—much to do; that is," stammeringly. "I must do some unpacking, you know."

Mr. Grayling seated himself near her; do what he would he could not be at ease. He took a cigar from his pocket and was about to light it, but at a deprecating glance from his fastidious wife he thrust it back.

Several moments passed in silence. It was broken by the lady, who, still looking in the fire, said calmly:

"What was the name of the young man who escorted your venturesome daughter home to-night, Gilbert?"

The old man's eyes flashed keenly over her; but he could not see her face.

"His name is Manton—Thorle Manton," he replied, closely watching her.

"Thorle!" she echoed. "What a queer name."

"Yes; did you ever hear of him?"

Another little tremor ran over her frame; but after pondering for a moment, she answered in a voice as calm as ever—though she did not turn her head:

"His name is familiar to me, I think. Did he not have a strange love-affair once—in New York, I believe?"

"Hang his love-affairs!" growled the old gentleman, unceremoniously. "I know nothing of them. But, Cynthia," and he endeavored, unsuccessfully, again to get a look at her face, "it seems to me that you know, or have heard of, almost everybody!"

The lady only laughed, as she said:

"Certainly, of a great many! But was not this fine old mansion once owned by him?" she continued, now turning and looking him full in the face.

"Yes. He ran in debt, and ended up by fleeing from the country. I bought this property, and my money paid for it—went to settle his debts. But—"

He paused, and stroked his chin thoughtfully. He was no longer suspicious; he was interested, for other thoughts filled his mind.

"But what, Gilbert?" she urged.

"Why, I had hoped to purchase his old Lodge estate, and add it to the broad acres of the Grange."

"And of course you will do it?"

"Not so certain about it."

"And why not?" and she spoke with some uneasiness.

"Because, if report is true, Thorle Manton is able to keep it himself. From what my daughter told me this evening, he is a wealthy man—maybe far more so than I am."

As he spoke, he cast his eyes thoughtfully toward the ceiling.

This time a violent shiver passed over his wife's frame, and again she glanced hastily in the fire. Her lips quivered, and her cheeks grew haggard, and deathly pale.

Nothing of this her husband saw.

"Speaking of my own money affairs, Cynthia," he resumed, still musingly, "I have discovered that I have been losing considerably. I half-way distrust my head clerk, Abner Denby."

"Ah? and what remedy will you propose in the matter?"

"Why, Denby is a valuable man; but he needs watching; I know it. His explanations to me have not been entirely satisfactory; far from it."

"Then, of course, you will discharge the fellow at once."

"No, I think not."

"No? What then?"

"I'll summon him at once to the Grange, where I can have an eye upon him. I'll make him my private secretary, at the same salary which he is now getting. In a few months I can tell if he has had anything to do with the diminished income."

Mrs. Grayling's cheeks grew paler, and more haggard than ever. She sat for several moments, gazing silently into the fire.

"To the Grange!" she at length repeated, as though she had not understood him.

"Yes, to the Grange; and for the reason stated," was the reply.

A long silence ensued. It became monotonous. But, suddenly, as if he had forgotten something, the old gentleman looked up and said:

"You know, Cynthia, that our reception comes off two weeks from to-morrow night?"

"Yes; but I fear it will be a bore."

"Oh, no; far from it. You must get acquainted with our neighbors, you know. I wish to show them what a dear, handsome wife I have."

He laughed kindly; for a real love-light gleamed in his old eyes.

"Ah? yes. Thanks. But what of the reception, Gilbert?" she asked, dryly.

"Only this: I have determined to invite Thorle Manton, who—"

"Thorle Manton!"

"Yes, my dear; my mind is made up to do it. We have never had an absolute rupture. Besides that, he is a neighbor and has shown some friendly attentions toward my daughter."

Mrs. Grayling did not reply; she certainly could offer no objection.

At that moment the door quietly opened, and, quiet and snake-like, as was her way, Florine Flavell glided noiselessly into the room.

"Ah! at last, Florine!" and Mrs. Grayling arose at once. "Come with me to my chamber. I wish to see you in private."

With compressed lips, and a stern, cold fire in her pale-blue eyes, she swept majestically from the room.

Florine's thin-cut lips parted in a covert sneer as bowing low, she followed her mistress. Old Gilbert Grayling leaned back in his chair, stretched his legs before the fire, and ejaculated:

"My wife is a riddle! And may Satan seize that French wench!"

Mrs. Grayling crossed the broad, well-lighted hall, and turned into the dim, gloomy corridor upon which her spacious bedroom was situated.

"Three men are in my way!" escaped from her bloodless lips. "While either is living, real happiness can never be mine! Shall they live? if not, which shall be the first to go? So, so,"

as she reached her door, "he, whom of all men I dread, is coming here! His lips must—"

She opened the door, and, followed by the silent maid, entered.

No sooner was the door closed, than a man arose from the shadows by the wall, and paused for a moment in the corridor.

"I don't trust that woman!" he said. "She is plotting mischief; I must know more." Silently he stole down the corridor.

CHAPTER XIX.

DIGITALIS PURPUREA—DATURA STRAMONIUM.

As Thorle Manton leaned back in his old carriage, and drew his overcoat around him, he muttered:

"Heaven and earth! When will wonders cease? Have I been a wanderer the wide world over, only to return to this bleak, desolate region—here to be amazed, shocked and dumb-founded? *She* here! *She* the wife of Gilbert Grayling! Has that woman read to the old man from the history of the past a soiled and loathsome page?"

The snow was whirling rapidly; the night was almost inky dark, and the cold raw winds, sweeping from the neighboring lake, crooned over the shrouded earth. This night was a fitting companion to the one of just a week before, when Grace Grayling had returned to the Grange.

But the young man, Aleck, knew the road almost as well by night as under the glare of the bright sunlight. He was born here, and had grown to manhood in this out-of-the-way, dreary region. He guided the tottering horses with steady hand.

The long, dark grove leading to the Lodge was entered; then at last, after many jolts and creakings, the vehicle stopped at the quaint old mansion hid in the woods.

Thorle Manton aroused himself from his reverie.

"If she has *not* told that dark and damning tale, she must!—by heavens, she must and shall!" he hissed, through his locked teeth, as he descended from the vehicle, and strode up the doorsteps. "I owe it to myself and to others to unmask—"

He opened the door, and disappeared within the house.

In the large, comfortable sitting-room Margoun, the Hindoo, was standing before the cheery grate when the young man entered.

The East Indian's face was serious. A restless, roving glance glittered from his eyes, and hard, stern lines were gathered near his lips. But these ominous expressions flashed away in a second of time when he saw Thorle.

The young man paid no heed to the Hindoo's face; he was too much absorbed in his own thoughts.

"News, Margoun!—news!" he said, while a half-wicked triumphant gleam sparkled in his eyes.

"Yes, sahib," was the quiet reply.

Thorle Manton leaned over and whispered a few words in the other's ear.

Despite Margoun's stoicism and marvelous self-control under almost any circumstances, he now betrayed a visible start.

"*She!*" fell from his lips.

"Yes! and the wife of a rich man!" hissed Thorle. "At last, the marble-browed, icy-hearted woman is in my power, and by all the gods she shall do my bidding, or abide the scathing, blasting consequences!"

He struck his clenched hand fiercely upon the table. His face was dark with storming passion.

For several moments Margoun said nothing; but at last looking up he remarked calmly:

"After all, she is a woman; and sahib is a strong man, a chivalrous gentleman!"

Thorle Manton felt the rebuke; his cheeks flushed, and a softer look spread over his features. But almost in an instant the hard, exacting expression flashed back again.

"No, I cannot, for I dare not, spare Cynthia Summers!"

Twelve o'clock struck in the old hallway of the Lodge that night ere Thorle Manton arose to seek his bedroom in the second story.

A long and earnest conversation had, in the meantime, been carried on between him and the faithful Margoun.

As the young man bade the Hindoo good-night, and was leaving the apartment, the dusky fellow, his face suddenly serious again, advanced and touched him lightly on the arm.

"A moment, sahib," he said, in a low tone, at the same time casting a quick glance behind him at the narrow windows.

"Well, Margoun; what is it?" asked Thorle, startled at the other's manner.

"Margoun has seen a strange shadow flitting around the house, this black night," was the reply.

"What? a shadow!" and an uneasy look suddenly settled over the young man's features.

"Ay, sahib, and I also saw in the early gloom of the evening, pressed against yonder window, a small white face."

Thorle Manton trembled, and his eyes wandered furtively toward the window indicated.

"He here?" he muttered, to himself. "Moses Denby here! Yes, Margoun," he continued, aloud, "we know the villain! Keep your eyes open, and your faithful weapon handy."

"I am Margoun, the Watchful; I have this still!"

As the Hindoo spoke, he half-drew from his bosom the glittering kreese.

Thorle Manton, stern man though he was, could not repress a shudder at the terrible look which flashed from the East Indian's eyes.

But again bidding the other good-night, he left the room.

When alone, Margoun strode for several moments up and down the floor. Then he walked to the window, raised it cautiously and looked around in every direction.

The whirling snow and the raw east wind struck him in the face. He saw nothing but the white-drifted heaps and the dark, crooning forest.

He lowered the window, secured the sash, and extinguishing the light, left the apartment and ascended to his chamber, which adjoined that of him whom he loved and served as a master.

Thorle Manton slowly made his preparations for retiring. When, at last, he flung himself upon the sumptuous bed, he thought:

"The plot is thickening! And who can see the end of it? She who played such a role in a dark drama of the past, is here! Ay! and already, shadows are haunting the Lodge!"

Long and silently sat old Gilbert Grayling by the glowing grate. More than once he had dropped off into a doze, only to start and look around him, as he fancied he heard Florine Flavelle coming to tell him that "madame" was awaiting him. But, in every instance, he was mistaken; the gaunt-faced, wicked-eyed French maid had not come.

She was otherwise engaged.

Arousing himself, Mr. Grayling lit a cigar, and flung a bucket of fresh coals on the fire.

"Hang it!" he muttered, "I can't sleep, and I can't go to bed. No! By Jove, once again I am not wanted in my wife's bedroom! Well, to occupy my mind, I'll write to Abner Denby, and tell him he must come. But I must be guarded in that letter, else the fellow may suspect, and—"

He took the lamp and walked to a writing-desk near the hearth. Right before the desk was a window. The curtain was drawn up.

Mr. Grayling chanced to glance through the window. He started slightly, glued his eyes to the pane and peered out.

"By Jove, somebody is in the conservatory!" he said, in surprise. "Who the deuce can be there at this time of night—half-past ten o'clock?" and he glanced at his watch. "Oh, yes; it must be old Silas, looking after the heat; 'tis a cold night. Yes, that's it."

He seated himself and commenced to write. In ten minutes he held up an ink-wet sheet and read the following;

"GRAYLING GRANGE, }
"Dec. 24th, 1873. }

"MR. ABNER DENBY:

"DEAR SIR:—After a short stay here, I find that I cannot possibly get along with any comfort to myself without having a confidential secretary. After some reflection, I can think of no one who could so well fill the place as yourself. As soon after the receipt of this as you can, come to the Grange. You will find the work comparatively light, and you shall receive the same pay as you are now getting. Turn over your business in the house to Mr. Richardson, who will assume its duties on a trial for six months. I need not add that the above is my command. Respt'ly yours,

"GILBERT GRAYLING."

The old gentleman nodded his head approvingly.

"Good!" he muttered. "'Command' is the right word. If Abner Denby fails to come he loses the place he already has; that's all. But he'll come; no danger of that! I can't exactly get along without him; though I must watch the—*rascal*, I came near saying."

Once again he resumed his seat before the fire. "Confound it!" he muttered, looking at his watch once more. "Am I to sit up all night? Or is— Ha! Here she is at last. Come in!"

Just then a rap had fallen upon the door. It was quick and sharp as though struck by a hasty hand.

"Well, Florine," began the old gentleman,

without looking around. "I suppose you have—"

"'Tis not Florine, Mr. Grayling," said a low, tremulous voice.

The rich man bounded to his feet and glared behind him.

"You, Silas! What the—"

"Yes, my dear master; and I want to see you in very urgent business," was the reply, as old Silas Warren, the head servant at the Grange, softly closed the door and entered the room.

The old man's kindly face was white as though from fright, and his lips were quivering from excitement.

"What the deuce do you want, Silas?" demanded Mr. Grayling, roughly; he was disappointed at not seeing the French maid.

"Oh, my dear master, you have made the grandest mistake of your lifetime!" moaned the old servant, wringing his hands excitedly.

"Mistake, Silas!" and the rich man recoiled in amazement. "What do you mean, old man?"

"Your wife—your new wife, sir! She is a trait—"

"Furies!" and Mr. Grayling caught the old domestic by the throat. "How dare you insinuate—"

"But I heard her!" gasped old Silas, struggling to free his throat. "She is a she-devil! She would—"

"Curses upon you!" and old Grayling struck him fiercely in the face several times. "How dare—"

"Oh! my dear master! I came only to warn you—to—"

"By all the gods, but this is too much!" and old Grayling hurled the helpless old man to the floor, kicked him from the room, dragged him through the hall to the front door, and hurled him out into the snow. "Now be off, you old scoundrel!" he continued, carried away by his anger. "You speak such words of my wife! Be off, I say! and freeze if you may! But dare put your accursed foot in this house again, and I'll shoot you like a dog!"

He closed the door, locked it and turned to go into the sitting-room. But he halted at the sudden sight of Florine Flavelle.

"Madame awaits Mons—Mr. Grayling," said the maid, with a bow.

His bosom still filled with rage, the "aristocrat" strode to his bedroom.

Poor old Silas Warren lay for ten minutes helpless and prostrate in the snow. At last he revived and struggled to his feet.

"He has driven me away!" he murmured, as tears streamed down his face. "He has struck me, and has threatened my poor old life. Yet, ah, heavens, I have served him so long, and loved him and his so much! Ay! and I only went to put him on his— But he has driven me away, and I must go. Can I reach Shoreville in such weather, to night? Oh, God, stand by poor Betsy!"

He crept down the dark grove, through the flying snow. At last he reached the gate that opened into the dim, ghastly highway. Then he paused and glanced toward the faint lights of the mansion.

From the moment that Gilbert Grayling's young wife entered her room, immediately after her brief interview with her husband, she was engaged in a close and earnest conversation with her constant companion, Florine Flavelle.

Nor was that conversation carried on in a guarded tone. The lady thought herself perfectly secure; the idea of listeners being abroad did not enter her head for a moment.

Little did she dream that a crouching form was at her door in the dim-lit passage, and that an ear was at the keyhole.

The conversation lasted till a late hour. Then Mrs. Grayling said, in a low, vexed tone:

"Very unfortunate, Florine, that you lost some of the drops. I fear that we will not have enough—for our purpose."

"I assure madame that I acted for the best. I tried a drop on a cat to see if its virtues still remained. You know it has been three years since, at Baden-Baden, it was—"

"Yes, yes," hastily interrupted Mrs. Grayling, with paling cheeks. "But the cat. How did—"

"The beast was dead in five seconds," interrupted Florine, with a grim smile.

"Then, all is well. But," she continued hastily, "you know botany, Florine?"

"Well! It has been my favorite study," answered the maid, with another grim smile, her dark eyes lighting up.

"And you know poisonous plants?"

"Better than all others!"

"Good! There is a conservatory connected with this old rat-trap. Take a light, Florine, go into the conservatory and take notes. The vial may give out; we may need other silencers. Be on your guard."

"Trust me, madame. You pay me well," and she arose and took a small night-lamp from the mantle.

"I'll pay you better, Florine; I can command money now."

Florine opened the rear door to the room, and, concealing her lamp beneath her apron, stole out.

She was gone fifteen minutes, when she softly re-entered the apartment.

"Well, Florine?" in a whisper.

"I have found two or three of the deadliest of all plants."

"Ah! and they are—"

"First, the *Digitalis Purpurea*, an acro-narcotic poison, and—"

"Yes, Florine, and the other?"

"The *Datura Stramonium*, a deadly narcotic, especially when used in apoplectic cases, and you know that mons—"

"Enough! I must study upon the *Digitalis Purpurea* and the *Datura Stramonium*!" laughed Mrs. Grayling, as she arose. "Now, Florine, go and tell that old man that he can come to bed!"

CHAPTER XX.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

GILBERT GRAYLING'S young wife spent her Christmas eve in a strange manner.

Late as it was when she at last retired, she was up with the rising of the sun. But when the morning rays fell upon her face it was pale and haggard.

She had not slept much.

Long before old Gilbert Grayling was awake, she left the room, and crept into the chamber allotted to her French maid.

A very strange procedure in a mistress of such a grand mansion.

Florine was already dressed.

"I spoke to you last night of a certain man, you know whom, Florine?"

"Yes, madame."

"You know the whole of that dark story—have known it for years," pursued Mrs. Grayling, her eyes flashing and her brow darkening.

"Yes, madame."

"That man lives near here. You must take a letter to him."

"I, madame! But where does—"

"Thorle Manton, he whom of all men I hate and fear, lives not two miles from this house," interrupted the lady, hurriedly. "His old rookery is hid behind the copse in front of the Grange gate. You can find it."

"Yes, madame; but there is—"

She paused, her thin lips parted, and a cold hard smile passed over her face.

"But what, Florine?"

"There is some risk in this trip, to say nothing of inconvenience. Madame did not secure my services for such work."

"I understand you, Florine; you wish extra compensation in this matter."

Mrs. Grayling frowned as she spoke.

"Madame surmises correctly," was the quiet reply.

"You shall have it. I have an exchequer which I can draw on without fear. The old man sleeps. 'Tis well. Wait a moment, Florine; I'll pay you in advance, and well."

The lady lost no time. Hastily slipping off her shoes, she stole back into her bedroom.

Mr. Grayling was still sound asleep; his lusty breathing echoed in the room.

The lady crept to the chair upon which the old gentleman's clothes were thrown; a moment and her hand was thrust into one of the coat-pockets. She took out a portly purse, opened it and drew forth several new, crispy bank-notes.

At that instant her husband's loud breathing suddenly ceased, but she paid no heed to it; she was too intent on her strange work.

At that very moment her husband's eyes were bent wonderingly upon her, an expression of pain resting upon his features. But he lay still and said nothing.

Without even a further glance toward the bed, Mrs. Grayling stole like a thing of guilt—as she was—from the room.

As she closed the door behind her, the old man sprang from the bed and strode to his clothes. Snatching out the pocket-book, he hurriedly examined its contents. He scowled, and bit his lips.

"Fifty dollars gone!" he ejaculated, bitterly.

"What is mine is hers, of course; but must I

look upon my wife as a common thief? What can she want with that money? Ay, and the sun is hardly up!"

Silently and sadly, with many misgivings at his heart, he proceeded to make his toilet. At last, as he finished, and left the chamber on his way to the sitting-room, he shook his head and muttered:

"Poor old Silas! Should I not have listened to him? Yes, yes; I cannot shake that feeling off. A cloud is hanging over me! Alas! I fear that the quickly-coming future is laden with woe and misery to me. And why? Because in my old age I have made a fool of myself by marrying a pretty girl who is young enough to be my daughter! But is Cynthia indeed an adventuress?"

A thorn was in old Gilbert Grayling's bosom. Mrs. Grayling held out the notes to the maid, with a triumphant look, when she returned.

"Here, Florine; this is good pay for being a letter-carrier," she said, with a low laugh. "Take it all; there's plenty more where this came from."

Florine's long fingers clutched the money; her eyes flashed greedily over the notes. Then, with an approving smile, she hid them in her bosom.

"Now paper, pen and ink, Florine," said the lady, a frown gathering on her brow. "This matter must be attended to at once. I must anticipate that man! For if Thorle Manton should open his lips here, and tell what he knows of the past, my dream of gold and of glory would be dissipated forever. Quick, Florine!"

The maid did not reply. This was an oldtime tale to her. She only smiled, as going to her trunk, she took from it a portfolio.

Mr. Grayling pondered for several moments ere she began to write. Her pale-blue eyes glinted under the corrugated brows, and her shapely lips quivered with emotion.

But, driving the pen into the inkstand, she began the letter. Her small hand glided swiftly over the spotless page. She dried the ink-wet sheet, and read it. Folding it, and addressing the envelope, she arose.

"When breakfast is announced, Florine, steal out with this letter, and see that it is delivered," she said, giving the maid the missive. "I would prefer that you should not be seen; and that, therefore, is the most fitting time to go. Attend to this matter, *well*, and you shall lose nothing."

"Trust me, madame," was the reply; and Florine slid the letter in her bosom.

When Mrs. Grayling left the room, her French maid quickly drew out the letter, cautiously opened the still-moist flap, and extracted the sheet. A moment and she had read every word. A derisive smile parted her lips.

"Cringing! and so soon!" she ejaculated, scornfully. "But she'll show her claws in time—never fear!"

That morning, at the breakfast-table, but little was said. Grace was silent; for her heart was sick and sorrowful. Clara Dean was keen-eyed and watchful as was her wont. Old Mr. Grayling was morose and gloomy; and his wife dispatched her meal in a quiet, business-like way.

The ever-present French maid, with her glittering eyes and saturnine face, was, for a wonder, absent. So was old Silas Warren, the head servant. But old Aunt Betsy was there; and her humble features were now overcast with an expression of meek, yet poignant sorrow. It was plain that the old dame was missing her aged, faithful helpmeet.

Grace and Clara soon left the table; but the old gentleman lingered. He was covertly, sternly, observing his wife's movements. She had not spoken a dozen words. She pushed back her plate, and was about to leave the room.

"A moment, Cynthia, my love," said Mr. Grayling, tenderly, his words trembling just the least bit.

Something was burdening his mind. A painful duty was thrust upon him. But he must meet it. He was going to test his wife.

Mrs. Grayling paused at once, and cast a quick, searching glance at him. She paled somewhat at the strange, determined look upon his face; but, calming herself, she said:

"Well?"

The old man started at her cold tone. It meant defiance. An angry flush mantled his cheek.

"I have missed some money from my pocket-book," he said, coming straight to the point. "Did you take any, my dear, without my knowledge?"

At his first words, Mrs. Grayling's cheeks

whitened into a deadfry pallor, her limbs trembled and she grasped the back of a chair to steady herself. But she knew that her husband's eyes were upon her. She must answer.

"N—o," she stammered. "Do you suppose I would steal, sir?"

"I only know that I miss fifty dollars from my pocket-book, Cynthia," he answered. "You and that confounded—that—French maid of yours, are the only persons who have had access to my room since last night. Of course, my dear," and he forced a softness, which he did not feel, into his tones, "my money is always at your disposal; but you must—"

"Very good; but I have answered you, sir," she interrupted; and with a toss of her head, she strode haughtily to the door.

Mr. Grayling turned and strummed on the window-pane.

"Ha! hello!" he exclaimed, with a start, as he looked out of the window. "Yonder is that viper—that French maid of yours! Where has she been? What the deuce does she mean by leaving the house whenever she feels like it?"

Mrs. Grayling trembled, and a deepening scowl spread over her face.

"Certainly you do not begrudge the girl exercise and fresh air?" she answered, with a contemptuous curl of her lip. "Besides that, she is my servant," and the lady left the room and hastened to her own apartment, there to meet Florine, who had returned much sooner than her mistress expected.

When his young wife had gone, old Gilbert Grayling ground his teeth in anger and bitterness.

"My wife has lied to me!" he muttered, in a hoarse voice. "She is a thief and a liar! Oh, heavens, that I should utter such words. Something wrong, something deep and dark is going on in this house! Well, well, I must keep my eyes open. Ay! and I daresay I had better look over a certain paper; some alterations may be necessary."

He drew from an inner pocket of his vest a long, folded document, and drew near the writing-desk, to which previous reference has been made.

That morning just after breakfast Thorle Manton and Margoun sat smoking in the dining-room of the Lodge. They were suddenly startled by a rap at the door.

"Come in," said Thorle, looking around.

The door opened, and Susan—now regularly installed as chambermaid in her old home—entered.

"A lady wishes to see you, Master Thorle," she said in a mysterious way.

"A lady!" and young Manton bounded from his chair.

"Yes, sir—a strange-looking person she is."

"What does she look like?" asked Thorle, trembling as he put the query.

"Couldn't see her face, sir," was the reply. "Her veil was down; but she has black hair."

"Ah! yes, exactly. Where is she, Susan?"

Thorle Manton's face showed a half-relieved, half-disappointed look.

"In the parlor, sir," answered the girl.

"Very good; tell her I'll be at her service in a moment."

Susan withdrew.

"Who the deuce can this early caller be?" muttered the young man, as he laid aside his cigar and arose. "However, I'll see her. I'll be back in a moment, Margoun. No doubt she is some one soliciting charity."

He left the room. In a moment he was in the parlor, to meet Florine Flavelle, the French waiting-maid at the Grange.

"Are you Mr. Thorle Manton?" she asked at once. Her strong foreign accent was very marked.

The young man was surprised; but he replied, with a bow.

"I am. How can I serve you?"

"By reading this letter, and dispatching by me a reply thereto," answered Florine, handing him the missive.

"Pray be seated, madam," said the young man, wondering more than ever; and as the maid sunk into a chair, he hurried to the window and raised the curtain.

One glance at the superscription, and Thorle Manton recoiled. His bronzed cheeks flushed, then paled. He knew that handwriting well, though more than five years had elapsed since he had seen it. Bending his head to conceal the tell-tale expression on his face, he broke the seal, and took out the sheet.

After a momentary pause he began to read; and as he read on, the natural hues of health returned to his face, his cheeks glowed, and a

stern frown gathered ominously upon his brow.

"Who sent this?" he said, pointedly, as he refolded the sheet and placed it in his bosom.

"She who wrote it; she whom I serve—Madame Grayling of Grayling Grange," promptly answered Florine.

"Do you know the contents of this letter, then?" continued the young man, eying her sharply.

It was well for the French maid that she had her veil down, for her face reddened at Thorle's abrupt query.

"I am only my lady's waiting-maid, sir," said Florine. "'Tis not my business to know the contents of her letters."

"Have you any idea of the contents of this one?" insisted the young man; for he distrusted the woman's manner.

"Monsieur is exacting!" retorted the maid, her eyes flashing venomously. "I answer, no."

"Ah! Very well. I'll send a reply by you. I'll not tax your patience," and something like a grim, vindictive smile played around his lips.

He seated himself by a table and dashed off a hasty note. Sliding it into an envelope he secured the flap with wax, imprinting on it his seal-ring. He evidently did not trust the messenger's integrity.

"Be so kind as to give this to Mrs. Grayling," he said, handing her the letter.

Florine took it, bowed stiffly and left the house.

"Clouds are gathering! but the sunlight will yet shine through!" muttered the young man, again approaching the window. "Where will all this end? Will it terminate in farce or tragedy? But let me read again what this vile woman, this Cynthia Summers, writes!"

He opened the sheet.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS—ON A STRANGE ERRAND.

OLD Gilbert Grayling sat for several hours that day by the desk. He had read the long, folded paper several times; and each time he shook his head.

"That document does not suit me," he ejaculated, flinging it upon the table, and drawing a sheet of foolscap toward him. "I daresay that I can make an improvement upon it—a *just* improvement."

For more than an hour he wrote; and sheet after sheet of paper he filled, only to destroy. But at last he seemed satisfied; for, folding the sheet last finished, he ejaculated:

"This will do, shall do. And I will put it in a safe place."

Folding the paper into a narrow, compact shape he inserted it in his vest bosom, between the lining and the cloth—pinning the small rent he had made, and thus securing the document in its hiding-place.

"'Tis a very serious matter to draw such a paper," he muttered, as at last he pushed his chair back and arose. "It is sometimes far more serious and difficult to *keep it from other eyes*."

At dinner that day Mrs. Grayling did not put in an appearance. Nor did she send any excuse therefor, until her husband dispatched old Betsy to inquire. The lady was suffering from a severe headache. At least, that was the excuse.

The old gentleman frowned, but said nothing. He knew that the clouds were growing blacker and blacker above him; that his senile folly of marrying a headstrong girl was rapidly producing its appropriate fruit.

As the sun slanted toward the west that afternoon the family sleigh was brought around to the door. A few moments later Mr. Grayling and his daughter entered it.

"Drive to Shoreville," he said to our old acquaintance, John, who held the reins; and the sleigh glided away toward the road.

The old gentleman had not invited his wife to accompany him; he had not seen her since breakfast. He had his own reasons.

When the sleigh had entered the long, level, snow-covered highway, Mr. Grayling turned to his daughter and said, in a low, uneasy voice:

"I wanted to see you alone, my child, and where there would be no chance of eavesdroppers."

He spoke earnestly, and in a kinder tone than he had used toward her since his return home.

"Yes, father," answered the girl, yearningly, nestling close to his side. For she had sadly missed his old-time paternal love.

"What I may say, my child, is between us as father and offspring. And is sacred," he said, in the same cautious undertone. "I want to speak with you concerning matters at the Grange."

"Yes, father," and the maiden's heart beat faster. "I am listening."

"In the first place, I distrust Florine Flavelle, that confounded French maid of my wife's."

"I dislike her from my heart!" was the quick reply.

"Now a question, Grace—a plain, open question—to which I wish a candid, honest reply. How do you like your step-mother?"

The maiden's eyes flashed into her father's face, while a sudden glow sprung into her cheeks.

"I almost hate her, father!" she began, impetuously. "Hate her, because—"

She paused and looked down, while her little hands gripped one another convulsively.

Mr. Grayling trembled. But he urged her on.

"Because what, my child?" he asked, in a shaky whisper.

"Because she hates you! I can see it, my dear papa!"

As though a knife had entered his bosom the old man drew back.

"And do you, too, my child, see that?" he murmured, after a lapse of several minutes.

"As plain as I can see yonder sun in the heavens!"

A long silence ensued.

The low-lying village of Shoreville, nestling upon the borders of the lake, was now visible in the dim distance. Just before the sleigh entered the narrow, crooked streets Mr. Grayling, who had been wrapped in thought, turned to his daughter and said:

"I have a strong feeling, my child, that my days on earth are growing to a close."

"Oh, my dear papa! Don't—"

"But whenever I do go, my dear child, you will find that your old father, who in his latter years might have erred in some things, loved you to the last—that he has amply provided for you—"

"Oh! papa—"

"There, there, Grace; banish this conversation now. Here we are in the village. How beautiful the frozen, snow-covered lake looks!"

When the sleigh left the Grange it and its occupants were observed; and by keen eyes, too.

At that very moment Mrs. Grayling was standing by her bedroom window, which looked out over the grove. She started back, and an expression, unfitting a lady's lips, escaped her.

"What does that mean?" she exclaimed, angrily. "How dare that old fool thus slight me? Why does he take that baby-faced daughter of his with him?"

She turned, strode from the chamber, and made her way to the room in which her husband had been writing that day. In a moment her eyes fell upon the long sheet, which that morning her husband had flung upon the desk.

She snatched it, opened it and glanced over it. She started violently.

"Ha! what is this doing here!" she muttered. "It interests me more than any living soul! Ay! and the time may be soon at hand when—"

Hastily concealing the paper in her bosom, she left the room.

We must return for awhile to the Lodge. The reader will recall the circumstances under which we left Thorle Manton.

Smoothing out the letter which had been brought to him by Florine Flavelle, the young man, in an undertone, read the following:

"GRAYLING GRANGE, }
Christmas Morning, 1873. }

"THORLE MANTON, Esq.:

"Sir:—I doubt not but that you will be surprised at receiving this from me. You cannot be more so than I was last night when after a lapse of long years I saw you once again—you of all men, whom I cared not to meet. I had hoped that time, nor circumstance could bring us together again; but fate or destiny, or Providence, or whatever you may call it, has ordained otherwise. I know that the breach between us can never be bridged over; nor do I care to have it. You may have some cause for complaint against me. But, as we naturally look at the same object from different stand-points, 'tis useless to discuss the matter. However, I have an object in addressing this note to you; that object is not to rake up the past. Let it and its dark and bitter tale be buried forever. You know my position now, my new relations in life. A word from you to my husband would sunder those relations, and destroy my worldly prospects beyond all hope. You see I frankly admit that I am in your power, that you hold me by the throat. And, in this admission, I throw myself upon your mercy, your generosity! Gilbert Grayling does not know the relation in which I stood to you in the past, and ah, heavens, in which even now I may stand to you! I beg and implore you to say nothing to him on that subject. You would only ruin me and be-

fit yourself nothing at all. I wish you to promise me that much. If you do, I will be content, for I know that you never break your word. I entreat you to give me this pledge. Send me just a line in reply by bearer of this, and oblige

"CYNTHIA GRAYLING."

Thorle Manton laughed low and tauntingly; and stepping to the grate flung the letter in the fire. As he watched it burn slowly away to ashes, he muttered:

"Well, well, she will soon have my answer! Then what will be the next move of this money-loving, heartless thing, who flung my love away, broke her— But," checking his vehemence, and in a softer tone, "ought I not to pity her infirmity? Yes, yes, I am a strong and rich man; and after all, she is only a woman!"

He left the room, and sought Margoun, to light another cigar and await further developments.

Florine Flavelle had watched the young man closely, when he was inditing his reply to Mrs. Grayling's letter. Her lips had shut viciously together as she saw him take the precaution to seal his envelope with wax. She rightly surmised the reason therefor. But she could do nothing; her curiosity was blocked.

"Baffled!" she muttered, as she picked her way through the woods on her return. "I would give half of my mail-money to see inside this letter. But, what a handsome fellow is this Monsieur Manton! Just the kind to please a woman's eye!"

Thorle Manton's letter was duly handed to Gilbert Grayling's young wife. She trembled as she took it. But she thrust it in her pocket, and dismissing Florine to get her breakfast, walked to the window and gazed musingly out.

Mrs. Grayling feared to read the contents of that letter; she dared not trust herself to do so in the presence of Florine Flavelle. But, as soon as her maid was gone, the young wife snatched the letter out, tore the sheet from the envelope, and flashed her eyes over it.

Almost instantly a deathly pallor crept into her cheeks, and a little wail of disappointment and fear escaped her lips. But, controlling herself, she read the note. It ran:

"CHRISTMAS MORNING, 1873.

"MADAME GRAYLING:

"I dare say I address you correctly, as above, though in certain contingencies it might be a debatable point. However, let that pass. In your letter you refer to the relations which *may yet exist between us*. Suffice it to say on that point: I am thoroughly acquainted with said relations. You may not be. You also appeal to my mercy and generosity. I am lacking in neither of these attributes of character. But, allow me to ask, is it not a little singular that such an appeal should come from one who trampled upon the love of an honest man, and fled away with his wedding-ring upon her finger? Bah! I told you then, Cynthia Summers, that the reckoning day and the reaping time should come! And the gallant Prussian colonel! And was it indeed true that he fell at bloody Gravelotte? But enough of this. In reply to the gist of your letter, I would say, No! I can give you no pledge to keep my mouth shut. I would be more than villain, and less than man, were I to keep that dark secret from one who has a right to know it. I am well aware that you are, beyond redemption, in my power. But I will take no coward's advantage of you in that particular. In conclusion, I would say that, only on one condition will I keep silent, namely: that you, in my presence, tell the old man, *who in the eyes of the world is your husband*, that dark secret of the past. This I would do, as much to give you a clear conscience as to right the wronged.

"THORLE MANTON."

Mrs. Grayling crushed the letter in her hand. Then she tore it to pieces.

"He is inexorable!" she hissed. "How can I do what he exacts? I must see Thorle Manton! Ay! and should some satisfactory arrangement not be reached, then woe to you, proud man! Your blood be upon—"

She wheeled from the window and returned to the writing-desk.

That day, about noon, Thorle Manton received another visit from Mrs. Grayling's French maid. As before, she brought a letter, stating that she would wait for a reply.

The young man, with a frown on his brow, opened the missive and read:

"MR. MANTON:

"Yours to hand. You are hard and harsh! This matter must be arranged, and at once. I must see you. If you cannot come here, I will go to you. Answer by bearer. For Heaven's sake, spare me, pity me!"

Distractedly,

"CYNTHIA GRAYLING."

The frown on the young man's face grew sterner; but as he finished reading the note, his brow relaxed, and a softer light gleamed in his eyes.

When Florine returned to the Grange she bore a sealed envelope to her mistress.

Mrs. Grayling, unable to restrain herself,

opened it and rapidly perused it. It ran thus:

"MADAME GRAYLING:

"I may seem hard and harsh—and God knows I have reason to be; but I am *just*. The matter can be arranged on the conditions explicitly stated in my last. I cannot, in such an affair as this, meet you at the Grange, save in the presence of him whom you recognize as your husband. As to visiting me, I will not shut my doors upon you. I will spare you on the conditions already known to you. I do pity you.

THORLE MANTON."

Late that afternoon, when Mrs. Grayling returned to her room, after securing the mysterious paper which her husband had left upon the desk, she strode up and down the apartment for several moments.

But she suddenly paused. A bright look came to her face.

"What hinders me?" she exclaimed. "When will I have another such opportunity? Old Grayling and his daughter have gone; Florine is asleep, and I'll not be seen. Come, brave heart, stand by me now. I must see Thorle Manton!"

Nearly an hour after the sleigh had sped away toward Shoreville, Mrs. Grayling, closely wrapped and veiled, stole from the Grange and hastened down the grove, through which the evening shadows were beginning to fall.

She reached the highway, crossed it and entered the dense copse, behind which stood the old Lodge mansion.

CHAPTER XXII.

A VISITOR AT THE LODGE—PROWLERS IN THE COPSE.

THORLE MANTON was sitting alone in a room in the Lodge, which he had fixed up for a study.

Margoun had gone out for a stroll, for the sun was bright and the air bracing.

Thorle had not left the house that day. His mind had been filled with conflicting thoughts, ever since the reception of Mrs. Grayling's first letter. That matter had given him much concern. The situation of affairs was doubly embarrassing. Little had he dreamed, twenty-four hours before, that Gilbert Grayling's new wife was Cynthia Summers! There was between him and her a dark secret-link. What it was, was known only to those two.

During the day, he had looked over several papers, and written a half-dozen letters, some of which bore a foreign address. But now, as the slanting sun indicated the closing of the short winter day, he arose and strode moodily up and down the room.

So absorbed was he in his thoughts that he heard not the knocker when it fell on the front door, and echoed faintly through the old house. Nor did he arouse himself until a rap fell upon the door of the study.

He started with surprise, as Susan looked in and said:

"A lady wishes to see you, sir."

"Ah! Is it the same who was here twice to-day?"

"No, sir. This one is powerful handsomely-dressed, and she has light hair, Master Thorle."

Thorle Manton could not suppress a violent start. For a moment, his cheeks paled and a shiver ran over his form. But, turning away, he said:

"Show her in the parlor, Susan; I'll be there in a moment."

"She is in there now, sir," and the girl left the room.

"That woman is determined!" muttered Thorle, as he glanced into a mirror, arranged his necktie, and ran his fingers through his long black hair. "She is desperate! Well, I must be calm at least: for this will be a trying moment. Just to think of that terrible afternoon of the long-ago, when we parted for the last time! Oh, what I have suffered! Oh, the perfidy of woman's heart! And yet are they all so?"

He turned and walked slowly from the room. A moment later he paused at the parlor door, then entered, stern, haughty, and composed. Despite his every effort, his heart throbbed violently as the lady visitor flung back her veil, and advanced toward him. It was Mrs. Grayling, and at that moment she looked grandly beautiful.

"Thorle—Mr. Manton!" she almost whispered, extending her hand.

"Cynthia—Mrs. Grayling!" and the young man recoiled, and half turned away as though he preferred not to see the proffered hand.

"Certainly you will not refuse to take my hand, Thorle," she said in a low, ardent tone.

Young Manton's stern face softened; a strange, half-yearning light shone in his eyes, and advancing he clasped her hand in his own

strong palm. Almost in a moment, however, he drew back, and with a formal bow, said:

"Pardon me, madam, but I suppose this is to be a business interview?"

"As you will—yes, of course," was the hesitatingly reply. "Though I somewhat expected," and she sneered, "that you would have some upbraidings for me!"

"I though I have good cause to consider the sex my foe, I never make war on woman," was the reply.

"Ah! indeed! Your letter to me this morning is a fine sample of your generosity in that direction."

"I war not on woman as woman, but upon any one, where the object to be secured is justice," was the retort.

As if to change the subject, she returned, with a light laugh:

"Your heart may yet soften toward our sex, Mr. Manton. Old Gilbert—I mean my husband—has a handsome daughter, though a trifle baby-faced. I dare say you will find her susceptible, just like I was when I was a foolish girl of eighteen years."

The young man flushed deeply, and a half-pleased expression passed over his face. But it was gone in an instant.

"Pray be seated, madam, and we'll come to business at once. I dare say that to that I can attribute the honor of this visit?"

"I did come on business!" was her hot reply, as she flung herself into a chair. "You have me in your power; you could, by a single word, blast my present and future life."

"I am aware of it; please proceed."

"I would seal your lips forever."

So earnest and vehement was this reply, that Thorle Manton involuntarily drew back. But with a half-scornful smile he said, quietly:

"I am listening, madam."

"I have heard it reported that you are rich," she said, hastily. "For reasons of my own I do not believe the report."

She paused and glanced keenly at him. But the young man showed no surprise. He simply bowed.

"Therefore I make you this offer," continued the lady, eagerly: "If you will pledge me, in writing, that you will forever keep locked in your bosom *our secret*, I in turn will guarantee to give you, within ten hours after you sign the paper, the sum of five thousand dollars."

Thorle Manton's face flushed, and a look of unconcealed contempt, almost loathing, flashed over his features.

"Five thousand dollars! Bah! and do you not know me well enough, Cynthia Summers, to be assured that I cannot be bribed? Bah! *five thousand dollars!* Do you know, madam, that with one year's income of my fortune, I could buy all the property owned by your husband, rich as he is?"

Mrs. Grayling recoiled.

"Then 'tis true!" she muttered.

"It is true."

Several moments passed in silence, the lady gripping her hands, and young Manton respectfully awaiting her further pleasure.

"This matter *must* be settled!" at last exclaimed the woman desperately.

"On the conditions which you already know," was the answer.

A long, almost angry conference ensued, Mrs. Grayling more than once giving way to her passion. But at last another long, dreary silence settled in the room.

"You are cruel," muttered the lady, giving way to tears.

"I am just," was the reply.

"Oh, can you not be turned? Or, if you still insist on these hard terms, will you not give me time in which to carry out your stern exactions? I beg you, I implore you! on my knees—"

"Rise, madam," and he lifted her gently to her seat again. "I will give you time; but your confession to your husband must and shall come! How much time do you want?"

Mrs. Grayling, now awed and humbled, pondered for several moments.

"Two months," at last fell from her lips, as she gazed eagerly in his face.

"You shall have it, madam; but you must bind yourself to me, in writing, that, at the end of that time you will, in my presence, make a certain confession to your husband—I, in the same paper binding myself to preserve that dark secret."

"I agree."

"Good," and the young man sat down by the desk. At the end of ten minutes he held up two strips of paper, read them over, and handing one to the lady, said:

"Glance at that, and see if it accords with your views, madam."

Mrs. Grayling read it and replied:

"Yes, it is full enough."

"Then we will sign the papers; you to keep one, I the other. But," and he eyed her as she took up the pen, "you will oblige me by signing your name, Cynthia Summers Grayling."

The lady hesitated, but only for a moment, and then affixed her signature as desired.

Thorle accompanied her to the door.

The sun had now gone down, and darkness covered the gloomy copse. Mrs. Grayling seemed alarmed, and exclaimed, in a low voice:

"Good heavens! what shall I do? I am afraid to go home alone! Then too suppose my husband has—"

She checked herself as she glanced with terror down the dark woods.

"I will accompany you to the Grange gate; be not alarmed," said Thorle. "I would order a carriage, but unfortunately, the old—"

"Oh, no. If you will only see me through the forest, that will do; and I will feel infinitely obliged."

"I'll do so with pleasure, madam; wait a moment."

He returned for his overcoat and hat. When he was gone Mrs. Grayling murmured, in a low, frightened tone:

"Good heavens! Suppose the old man has returned, and discovered my absence! Oh!"

But just then young Manton joined her. The two left the house. As they were passing out of the inclosure a dark form emerged from the shadows beyond and approached the gate.

"You, Margoun?" asked Thorle.

"Yes, sahib. I would speak a few words in sahib's ear," was the reply, in a tone which reached Thorle Manton's hearing alone.

Excusing himself to the lady, the young man drew hastily to one side with the East Indian.

"Well, Margoun?" he whispered.

"Prowlers are abroad," was the cautious reply. "I have seen the man with the white face and glaring eyes! He is in the copse. Be on your guard, sahib!"

"So! And I am unarmed," ejaculated the other, with some concern.

"Here is my pistol."

Thorle took the weapon, hid it in his bosom, and rejoined the lady.

"My arm is at your service, madam." She took it; and the two entered the dark woods.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF A SLEIGH-RIDE—IN THE CONSERVATORY

Not a word was spoken by the two as they entered the copse. Mrs. Grayling clung to Thorle Manton's arm with nervous fright. And he, tall, silent and stern, strode along, giving her every attention, and sometimes helping her by main strength over deep snow-drifts which impeded their way.

It was a long and tedious walk, and more than once the young man had to stop and look around him to satisfy himself that he was in the right way. For it was now so dark that only a faint, dim light could be seen above the somber, snow-clad trees.

At last the dense thicket was cleared, and the broad, ghostly highway was reached.

"I'll see you safely inside the Grange gate, madam," said Thorle, speaking for the first time since they had left the Lodge. "Then if you will excuse me I'll—"

"Of course," she hastily interrupted. "On no account would I have you go with me to the mansion. But this interview with you is sacred, Mr. Manton?"

"To divulge it would benefit neither of us; 'tis sacred with me, madam," rejoined the young man.

"Then I am under obligations, sir, for your escort; and now bid you good— Ha! there! 'Sh! what is that?' and with a startled cry she clutched his arm, which she had released, and cowered to his side.

A loud, excited, "Whoa! whoa!" had broken on the air. The cry was mingled with the tramping of restless horses and the creaking sound of a sleigh rushing like wind over the snow.

"Whoa! whoa!" rung out again the cry. And it was rapidly approaching the spot where, in the middle of the highway, stood the wondering Thorle Manton and the frightened woman who clung to his arm.

"Whoa! Confound it, whoa!" rung out the rapidly-approaching cry, coming evidently from one who, having done his best to pull in the running steeds, was now holding on simply with the desperation of pluck.

"Hold them! for God's sake, pull them down, John!" shouted an old man's voice.

"Can't do it, sir!" was the reply. "The off-horse has broken the bit; the other has slipped the bridle!"

"Then we shall be dashed in pieces at the gate turn," the two in the highway heard the old man say.

This was answered by a stifled cry from the old man's companion. Thorle Manton well knew from whose lips it came.

"Stand to one side, madam!" he said, hastily, almost thrusting Mrs. Grayling from him and out of the way of danger. "The horses are running away! Life is at stake; and I must interfere!"

With a low moan of terror, the lady staggered from him; but, as if petrified with fear, stood still and awaited what was to follow.

Thorle sprang to the center of the road to meet the struggle so soon to come. In a moment the cutter dashed by like wind, but Manton sprang forward and, with a gripe of iron, clutched the off-horse by the nostril, and drew the frightened brute's head down to his forehead, fairly stifling his breath. Though dragged onward for a few rods both his terrible gripe and his weight deadened the speed of the horses. Then, by a sudden exercise of his great physical strength, he jerked the animal to its haunches, bore it back and hurled it broadside, full upon the snow.

The horse, in falling, tripped his companion, and in a moment both were floundering in the road.

Then John, the driver, who had stuck gallantly to his post, sprang out and grasped the horses by the head.

The sleigh was stopped, the danger was averted, lives had been saved, and the battle was over.

"You, Mr. Manton! Oh! Heaven bless you!" cried Grace, as she caught sight of her preserver.

"Mr. Manton!" exclaimed old Mr. Grayling, in a deep, grateful tone, "I shall never forget your gallantry—that you have saved our lives, sir. And— Ha! *she here?*" he suddenly muttered, his voice sinking to a low, distressed whisper, as his eyes fell on the close-wrapped female, who, thinking to escape observation in the confusion, fled through the gate and disappeared under the gaunt Lombardy poplars, in the grove.

Mr. Grayling and Grace, assisted by Thorle Manton, descended from the sleigh. They had determined to walk the intervening distance to the Grange, while John should lead the now humbled and docile steeds, with the broken cutter attached to them.

They parted at the gate; Grace and her father, after reiterating their warmest thanks to young Manton, entered the grove, while the master of the Lodge, after a long, lingering glance at the fading form of the fair-haired girl who had made such an impression upon him, turned, left the highway and plunged into the dark copse.

He had traversed more than half of the dark, dreary way homeward; but Margoun's earnest warning had not occurred to him. He was thinking of the strange events which, hour by hour, minute by minute, were thickening around him; he was thinking of Cynthia Summers and Grace Grayling.

Suddenly he was startled by the flash and sharp report of a pistol, fired not ten feet ahead of him. His hat was sent spinning in the air, as though struck from his head by the swinging stroke of a bat.

But he was untouched. In his haste to get out Margoun's pistol, the weapon fell into the snow, and when at last he succeeded in finding it, the form of the would-be assassin had disappeared.

The young man reached the Lodge without further adventure. On examining his hat he found that it had been perforated with a large bullet, evidently from a derringer pistol. The deadly missile had entered the hat just above the band, and must have grazed the wearer's hair.

A narrow escape, indeed!

It was a late hour that night when old Gilbert Grayling left the large, dreary sitting-room at the Grange and walked slowly toward his wife's chamber. A settled frown was upon his wrinkled face.

"No! I'll say nothing of it—certainly not until after our reception. But there's some unwritten mystery connected with my wife! There is a link between her and Thorle Manton! Will it ever be cleared up? Time will tell."

The next day came with a bright, cold, unclouded sky.

Mrs. Grayling did not appear at breakfast. "Madame" was quite unwell, said Florine.

Mr. Grayling was concerned; and after see-

ing his wife and consulting with her, concluded to send for Dr. Goodspeed, the village physician.

The lady made no objection at all; she seemed anxious to see the physician. But she did not have the appearance of a sick person; and so her keen-eyed old husband thought, as he shrugged his shoulders, and went in search of John, to dispatch him for the doctor.

Before noon Dr. Goodspeed, an old gray-haired and highly-esteemed gentleman, living in Shoreville, arrived.

Mr. Grayling introduced the doctor to his patient, and, excusing himself, retired to the sitting-room, there to do some writing.

After a close examination, the old physician, with a smile, said:

"Nothing serious at all, my dear madam; only a slight nervous prostration which of itself is rapidly wearing off. You are right in going to bed for it. You need a few simple remedies, and exercise in the sunlight."

"Glad that your opinion is so favorable, doctor," sighed the lady, languidly, as with a covert sneer upon her arching lips she watched the good man mix his healing potions.

"By the by, madam," he said, after a moment, turning toward her, "there is a conservatory connected with this mansion. I know it well."

"Yes, doctor," and she looked at him eagerly.

"Well, that is the place for you to take exercise in. You know that plants give out oxygen, and human beings—No, I daresay you know nothing about such matters," he continued, dryly. "But, that's the place for you to take exercise in."

"Yes, doctor; I am glad that you referred to the conservatory. I wish to ask a favor at your hands."

She spoke very earnestly.

"A favor? Certainly, my dear madam, if it lies in my power. What is it?"

"This: you see, there is a large collection of plants in the conservatory—a hobby of my dear husband's."

"Exactly, madam. And—"

"Among them are several *poisonous* plants, all labeled. These I wish to classify and arrange by themselves. Now," and she smiled insinuatingly, "I thought that some one of your abstruse doctor-books might aid me in my work."

"Precisely so. And I have just such a book, I always carry it with me. 'Tis my sheet-anchor, madam—THE UNITED STATES DISPENSATORY, by Wood and Bache."

"Yes, doctor; and will you loan it to me, just for a little while?"

"As long as you like, my dear madam; I'll get it for you."

The kind old gentleman hurried out to his sleigh, and soon returned, bringing with him the heavy tome.

Mrs. Grayling thanked him, and the physician left, promising to call again in a few days.

"That for the old fool's medicine!" exclaimed the lady, derisively, as she snatched the vial he had prepared and flung its contents out of the window. "I have got what I wanted!"

She opened the book and hastily searched through the index.

That afternoon, Mr. Grayling entered his wife's apartment. He started as, on looking around him, he failed to see her. The room was empty.

He passed out of the door that led to the conservatory. Glancing thitherward, he recoiled for a moment as, through the open door of the hothouse, he saw his wife with a large, open book in her hand, standing by a vigorous plant which grew in a box of rich earth.

Wondering what this could mean, he crept cautiously to the door, and paused within ten feet of her.

She was reading aloud from the book.

The old man bent his head to listen, and, in amazement, heard the following:

"Yes!" muttered Mrs. Grayling; "this is it; and Florine was right! Let me read it again."

Casting her eyes upon the book, she read:

"DIGITALIS PURPUREA . . . MEDICINAL PROPERTIES AND USES. . . . The various effects above detailed may result from digitalis given in doses calculated to produce its remediate influence. In larger quantities its operation is more violent. Nausea and vomiting, stupor or delirium, cold sweats, extreme prostration of general strength, hiccough, convulsions, syncope are among the alarming symptoms which indicate the poisonous character of the medicine. . . . The practical inferences deducible from these properties of digitalis, are first, that, after it has been administered for some time without effect, great caution should be observed not to increase the dose, nor to urge

the medicine too vigorously; and secondly, that after its effects have begun to appear, it should be suspended for a time, or exhibited in moderate doses, lest a dangerous accumulation of its influence should be experienced. In numerous instances death has resulted from its incautious employment."

The lady ceased reading, but continued gazing at the plant.

Mr. Grayling retreated unobserved, and re-entered the mansion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ARRIVAL AT THE GRANGE—SOMETHING SEEN.

OLD Gilbert Grayling could scarcely believe his senses, as, entering his wife's chamber, he tottered on and reached the sitting-room.

"God be thanked that I have drawn another paper," he muttered. "Now I will destroy the other, so that—"

He paused abruptly and strode eagerly to the desk. He flashed his eyes closely around. High and low he searched. Then he ransacked every drawer in the desk. But the paper was not to be found!

"Too bad!" he ejaculated, in a low, uneasy tone. "But, I daresay it has been thrown into the grate, as refuse paper; if so, all is well. If not—But it must be so."

Consoling himself with this reflection, he flung himself into a chair and gave way to moody thoughts which of late had been his constant companions.

A week elapsed.

Mrs. Grayling was soon well, and her stern, stately, beautiful self again. Dr. Goodspeed had in the meantime called as he had promised. He was glad to find that his "few simple remedies" had acted so well. Mrs. Grayling returned him his book with profuse thanks.

Thorle Manton had seen nothing of the Graylings since the adventure near the Grange gate.

But he and the faithful Margoun had not been idling away their time in the old Lodge. Every day, in company, they had scoured the copse in all directions; and they found ample evidence that strange feet had been prowling through the woods.

Footprints were abundant; and near the spot where Manton's life had last been attempted, a handkerchief had been found. On a corner of it, in indelible ink, were marked the following letters: "M. D."

Thorle knew well enough that his old foe, Moses Denby, was still on his track; and he had ample cause to be certain that the fellow was unrelentingly thirsting for his blood.

This circumstance gave the young man a good deal of concern. There had been a time in the not distant past when he would have laughed at all this, when nothing would have better suited his fiery nature, than to have hunted down Moses Denby, and fought with him—foot to foot—steel to steel—the wager of life or death. But that time had passed; for in his heart fresh pulses were beating, and he felt that a new world was opened up to him. He did not care to have his life jeopardized now.

Thorle Manton loved Grace Grayling.

As he and Margoun sat one evening alone in the study, while the early hours of twilight were settling over the Lodge, a letter was brought in by Susan.

"For you, Master Thorle," she said; "and a messenger from the Grange fetched it, sir."

Young Manton started at the word *Grange*, and took the letter with undisguised eagerness. But, he did not read it until Susan had left the room. Then he hastily broke the great seal of red wax and took out the sheet. With some surprise, and more pleasure, he read the following:

"GRAYLING GRANGE, }
"Monday eve. }

"THORLE MANTON, ESQ.:

"MY DEAR SIR:—I have been longing of late to call upon you in person, and thank you again for saving my life and that of my daughter, by periling your own. But I have been prevented by various circumstances. Suffice it to say, my dear young sir, that I shall never forget your gallant act; and, in the matter of heartfelt gratitude, Miss Grayling joins me in my expressions to you—I write this, too, to state that a week from to-night a grand reception ball will be held at my house, and to give you a most cordial invitation to be present. If you do not come I will be pained to ascribe your absence to an unpleasant incident of the past, which, for my part, I am most willing to forget. Besides that, if you will honor me by coming, I have a little private business matter to speak with you about—that is, if you are entirely so disposed. I am quite sure that we can get a few moments to ourselves. With renewed expressions of gratitude, I am, my dear sir, most faithfully,

"Yours,
"GILBERT GRAYLING."

Thorle smiled; but it was a bright, pleasant smile.

"The skies are clearing! I'll accept the invitation!" he muttered, as he drew a sheet of paper toward him, and wrote a brief note. Ringing a hand-bell, he dispatched it by Aleck to the Grange.

That afternoon the old stage-coach, that ran between Wyndham Station and Shoreville, and which had resumed its trips, paused at the gate of Grayling Grange. A solitary passenger alighted and entered the long, gloomy grove.

It was Abner Denby.

Mrs. Grayling was at the window when the stage-coach stopped. She saw the man descend from it; and as he drew near the house she started back with flashing eyes and whitening cheeks.

"Abner Denby!" she hissed, in a bitter, tremulous voice. "Ay! and this very night I must settle with him, or—"

Her words died away in a mutter.

When supper was over that evening, and as Abner was leaving the room, Mrs. Grayling brushed close to him, and whispered:

"Sit up to-night! Follow the messenger I'll send. I must see you. 'Tis a matter of money. Be mum!"

Then she passed on.

It was past ten o'clock. Abner Denby sat alone in the room which had been assigned him. Upon his small white face was a triumphant expression.

He was suddenly startled by a gentle rap at the door. Ere he could answer the summons the door was pushed open and Florine entered.

"A card for monsieur," she said in a guarded tone, handing him the bit of pasteboard.

Abner took it, and read, in pencil:

"Follow bearer. Keep your eyes open. *There's money in it!*"

CYNTHIA."

The two stole from the room at once.

It was past midnight when Abner returned. A glad look was on his face, and *victory* showed in his every feature. He pushed the door wide open and entered.

"A thousand dollars clear!" he laughed in his wicked way. "Ay! for what? Why, simply keeping my mouth shut for two months, and not telling old Grayling that his handsome wife once cared more than she would have him know for his head clerk, Abner Denby! Well, I certainly can sleep well on this! So I'll—"

He turned around to close the door, which was still wide open. But he started wildly back, and uttering a low cry of abject terror, sunk to the floor.

He had seen something at that ghostly midnight hour—something calculated to frighten a man of far more nerve than Abner Denby.

CHAPTER XXV.

A THING IN SHEETED WHITE.

ABNER DENBY had not heard a soft step in the dim corridor that ran by his door; but he saw a short, ghastly-looking figure clad in unbroken white from head to foot, stalk slowly by.

For five minutes the fellow lay motionless as though he were dead, his white face gleaming with a deathlike pallor in the light. But gradually his returning senses came to him and he struggled to his feet.

Just then a long, loud shriek rung through the mansion.

"This cursed old house is haunted!" he cried, in alarm. "For I have seen something—maybe the devil himself—to-night!"

He rushed to the door, drew it hastily to, and turned the key in the lock.

Then a dreamy silence reigned through the old mansion.

At an early hour that evening—in fact as soon as supper was over—Grace and Clara quietly withdrew and sought the privacy of their quaint but comfortable old room on the second floor. They had nowhere else to go.

The miserable, wretched and lonely life which Grace, with prophetic forecast, had thought would be her future lot, had already fallen upon her. She was an underling now where, formerly, she was the happy and light-hearted mistress. She saw but little of her young step-mother, and what little she saw impressed her all the more to her discredit.

Grace, in her own language, did indeed "almost hate" the new Mrs. Grayling. Nor was she particular in concealing her dislike from the lady—who cordially reciprocated the feeling. Neither did Grace scruple to speak her mind freely to her father. The old gentleman at first had frowned; then, soon, he only shook his head.

So old Grayling's fair-haired daughter, hav-

ing no congenial companionship, was compelled by force of circumstances to associate with Clara Dean more than she desired—with her whom she so recently had learned to distrust. She yearned to have some one with whom she could freely talk, and, before she knew it, she was once more breathing her troubles, and her inmost confidences, into Clara Dean's greedy ears. But when alone, and a reflective mood was upon her, Grace still distrusted the girl who was of old her room-mate and constant companion.

So far as that young lady was concerned, she contented herself to play a silent part in the life-drama that day by day was being enacted at the Grange. But her part was by no means a listless, inactive one. Clara Dean was wide awake and observant; she had laid a deep, well-considered plan to compass a certain end, and she was earnestly, though secretly, waging the fight.

Already, on that very evening, she had had a stolen interview with Abner Denby—and that, too, before he had been in the house three hours. At that interview she had learned that he was pleased with her haughty, distinguished manners, and with her handsome face and figure. She was sure that she could win him if she cared to, and she did care. She rightly conjectured that even if the "head-clerk" had dared to lift his eyes to his employer's fair-headed daughter, he no longer presumed to do so; for he knew too well, now, his supreme folly.

At that interview, too, Clara had casually mentioned that Thorle Manton was near at hand, domiciled in his old Lodge. And she had narrowly watched Abner Denby's face when she imparted the information. But she was somewhat disappointed that the private secretary evinced not the least surprise.

When he was alone, however, Abner, as a scowl of implacable hatred darkened his brow, had cried:

"Ay! Thorle Manton is here! So am I!—so is Moses!"

But, to return to the girls' room, to which they had retired so early this winter evening.

Grace had taken up a work of fiction, and for an hour or more had looked listlessly over its pages. But it was plain that she was not interested in it; for almost every moment she looked up, glanced out of the dark window, and sighed in a sad, weary way.

Finally she flung the book almost peevishly from her, and drew her chair closer to the grate. A little shiver went over her frame; for the night was cold and the fire on the hearth was smoldering.

Clara Dean had been busying herself at a piece of embroidery; but she was far busier watching Grace, and the changing expressions upon her sad young face. She said nothing, as her companion cast aside the book, and drew near the fire; she only continued with her work.

"How do you like this terribly boring life, Clara?" at length asked Grace, abruptly. "Be candid."

Clara glanced at her. For a second a bright light flashed over her face, and a triumphant smile curled her lips. But in an instant a hard look came to her face and her lips went together as she answered:

"I am compelled to like it! I have no choice in the matter. But, if I had my fifteen thousand dollars back, which your father lost for me so easily, why I might—"

"Will you ever cease harping on that disagreeable topic, Clara?" interrupted Grace, frowningly. "Pon my honor, I am half-tempted to ask papa to give you that amount, which you know he invested with the kindest motives for you!"

"I wish you would!" was the hot rejoinder. "Then if you were successful, I would leave this old rookery before another sunrise!"

"Ah! Then you don't like our new life here," said Grace, though her cheeks glowed. For she was recalling the fact that Clara Dean was a beneficiary upon her father's bounty.

"No, I do not; nor do I care the snap of my finger for anybody—"

But the hasty speech died away on the brunette's lips. Though she was on the point of speaking what was in her heart, yet to have uttered it was ruinous policy.

"You know, Grace, that, like you, I prefer city life," she continued, in a softer tone. "This quaint old mansion, this frozen lake, stretching out yonder, these dreary wilds and cold bleak hills have no especial charms for me."

"Nor for me," answered Grace. "Hark, now! Listen how wearily and sadly the cold winds whisper around the house!"

A shudder passed over her as, while she spoke,

the lonely night-winds crooned and groaned around the old Grange.

A long silence ensued. Gloomy thoughts seemed to be filling the bosoms of both the maidens. Even proud, ambitious Clara Dean seemed sober and thoughtful at the lonely dreariness that pervaded the Grange and its surroundings. But, while a sudden, strange, half-perplexed expression settled upon her features, she said:

"Isn't it singular, Grace, that your step-mother's given or maiden name is known to neither of us?"

Grace started. A puzzled look spread over her face.

"True enough," she said. "More than once have I thought of the same thing, and intended to ask papa about it, but always forgot it. Then, too, papa, in his usual pompous manner, always calls her 'Mrs. Grayling.' A wonder he does not add 'of Grayling Grange.'"

Despite her sad heart, Grace smiled at her last words.

But Clara Dean did not smile. A musing look, in the last moment, had gradually settled upon her face. Looking up quietly, she said:

"One thing is certain in my mind, Grace, and that is: your step-mother and Abner Denby have met before to-night!"

"What! And why do you think so?"

"I saw a glance pass between them, when your father so curtly introduced his hired man to her. There was something significant in that glance. Wouldn't it be quite strange if it should turn out that—"

She paused—a meaning smile playing around her lips.

"I saw no such glance," answered Grace, uneasily. "But you were going to say something else, Clara?"

"Only this: it would be strange if the present Mrs. Grayling should turn out to be the former lady-love of your father's head clerk—the fair, but faithless Cynthia Summers!"

Grace sat bolt upright in her chair; her smooth brow wrinkled and a hot reply was on her lips. But forcing a calmness she said:

"'Tis an insinuation unworthy of you, Clara; and what you say is sheerest nonsense. The very idea!"

Clara only smiled.

The two girls were certainly very wide-awake, for they continued to talk until long after the old mansion was wrapt in silence, until past the weird and witch-like midnight hour.

But at last they arose, and began their preparations for retiring.

"Did it ever strike you, Grace," said Clara, in an abstracted manner, "that this old mansion is a fitting place for a tiptop, first-class ghost promenade?" and she laughed loud.

"Ghost! Yes; and did you know, Clara, there is an old-time tale that the old mansion is haunted—that it is infested by the uneasy spirit of one of its long-time-ago owners, one of the Manton family, who met in some way with a sudden death?"

"Oh, yes; 'tis an old-time tale to me," was the reply. "This is a fitting hour for ghosts to walk; so say old women and wisecracks! And upon my soul, the deserted veranda under our window is a marvelous place for those unsubstantial nothings to take an airing upon!"

With a light, scornful laugh Clara walked to the window which opened upon the veranda. The curtain was drawn aside.

But a chill of sudden horror almost froze Clara Dean's heart, as, at that very moment, a short figure, in sheeted white, passed slowly by the window.

With a wailing cry Clara staggered back and fell to the floor.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NIGHT OF THE RECEPTION.

ABNER DENBY had heard the shriek; and he had seen, only a few moments before, the apparition which had passed by Grace's window.

There were two others in the mansion who heard the cry, likewise—Mrs. Grayling and Florine Flavelle.

These two were, at the time, in the maid's room wherein the lady had had her mysterious interview with Abner Denby.

She started at the cry, and exclaimed:

"Good heavens! What can that be?"

The French maid, though somewhat startled, soon recovered her wonted taciturnity, and smiled as she said:

"'Tis rumored, madame, that this old house is haunted; 'tis only my suggestion, you know."

"Haunted! Bosh! I rather fear that that white-faced fool, Abner Denby, has been seen, and—"

"Let us step out into the yard and take a

look," coolly interrupted Florine, moving toward the door.

Mrs. Grayling hesitated, then the two stole out into the cold night. Reaching the yard they glanced about them, then up at the dark veranda, running by the second-story window.

"Good heavens, madame! Look!" ejaculated the maid, in a frightened whisper.

She was pointing toward the further end of the long porch, at a short, dull-white object which was creeping away in that direction. A moment, and it disappeared as though suddenly swallowed up in the darkness.

Mrs. Grayling had seen it, then fled into the house, and stole like a guilt-cursed thing into her chamber, where her husband had been asleep for more than an hour.

It was known, the following day, that on the night which had just passed, a veritable ghost had been seen by more than one person under the snow-covered roof of the old home.

When this news reached the ears of Mr. Grayling he was visibly annoyed. He scouted the ghost theory *in toto*. When alone he muttered:

"Confound this thing! It bothers me—when I have enough on hand already! This may be some prowler who is after robbery and takes this guise to attain his object. As to the 'haunted' tale clinging to the mansion, 'tis simply absurd. 'Pon my soul, I am sorry now—for more reasons than one—that I dismissed old Silas. He would have been first-rate at ferretting out this mystery. I wonder where the poor old fellow is? I daresay in Shoreville. I must search him out and bring him back."

Mr. Grayling was not satisfied that day until he and John had made a search. The old mansion was ransacked from garret to cellar, and every hole and corner, nook, cranny and secret passage looked into. But, in vain. Nothing suspicious was found; and the scare subsided.

In due time the ghost rumor reached Thorle Manton. It came in such an authentic shape that when he heard it a serious look overspread his brow.

"I know the old-time tale concerning one of my dead ancestors," he remarked, with an incredulous smile. "But, that was worse than idle talk. I would give five hundred dollars if I was allowed to watch in the old mansion, if I could get my hands on this ghost. 'Tis my opinion that it would turn out to be that villain, Moses Denby."

For a long time he, and the ever-present Margoun, consulted about the affair; but as young Manton suggested the name of Moses Denby, the East Indian shook his head.

Another week rolled away, and at last came the momentous evening of the grand reception at the Grange.

Manton's prompt and polite note accepting the invitation had pleased Mr. Grayling vastly. His opinion of the young man had changed completely within the last two weeks.

Was it owing to the fact that Thorle Manton was now a wealthy gentleman? Or was it because Thorle Manton's leonine courage and iron arm had stood between him and her he loved, and death?

At all events old Gilbert Grayling was glad that his young neighbor was coming. He imparted the news to his daughter; and he noted well the quick flashing of her eye, and the sudden tingling of her cheek. He knew that she, too, was pleased.

The reception was indeed a grand affair. "All the world" was there. The elite of Shoreville and the surrounding country graced the occasion with their presence. Old Dr. Goodspeed, of course, was present. The fine old gentleman seemed inclined to patronize the greater portion of the company. He certainly took unusual pains to impress every one with whom he came into contact that he was the family physician at the aristocratic Grange.

At an early hour Thorle Manton was ready. He was arrayed faultlessly and richly; he never looked handsomer in his life.

The young man had been anxious for Margoun to go, too, intimating that he could readily secure him an invitation, but the tall, stately Hindoo had respectfully, yet almost haughtily, declined any such efforts in his behalf.

Then Thorle had entered his carriage, and was soon speeding through the dark, half-moonlighted copse toward the Grange.

But that carriage was not the same dilapidated vehicle in which, a short time before, the young man had escorted Grace and Clara to their home. Far from it!

Nor was brawny, broad-shouldered Alock, now in handsome livery, scarcely to be recognized as

the same ragged young fellow who drove the cart, with the broken-down steed, to Shoreville on the day of his young master's return to the Lodge.

Margoun was left alone. But he cared not. Seated in the study, he passed the time in smoking, reading, and promenading the room. But as the night deepened, he flung himself into a chair, and leaning back, gave himself up to thought.

Gradually his eyes closed, his hands sunk by his side, and a deep slumber fell upon him.

An hour passed; then another. Still Margoun slept on. But he suddenly awoke at last and glanced toward the window.

A quick, loud snapping as of an exploded gun-cap, coming from that direction, had awakened him.

A single look and he sprung to his feet. At the window, plainly showing by the light from within, were the shoulders, and white, square face of a man. He held in his hand a pistol.

Like lightning Margoun snatched out his own weapon and fired. Then came the sudden, sharp sound of shivering glass. A second, and it was followed by a loud howl of pain, as the white face, which the East Indian knew so well, disappeared from the window.

Margoun sprang forward, and flinging up the sash, looked out.

But the prowler was gone—gone, not to be seen again around the old Lodge.

Margoun quietly reloaded his pistol, and resumed his seat, determined to remain up until his friend should return.

Midnight passed; then the early hours of morning came. The East Indian still waited and watched.

It was nearly day when the faint creaking of carriage-wheels echoed in the inclosure at the Lodge. A few moments later Thorle Manton entered the room.

His face was as white as a winding-sheet; he was trembling from head to foot.

"Strange news, Margoun!—strange news at the Grange to-night!" he said, in a voice almost sepulchral in tone, as he flung himself into a chair, and almost glared at his dusky companion.

We must return to the Grange.

Thorle Manton was the observed of all observers, and he was most warmly welcomed by Mr. Grayling. When he was presented to the flashing, resplendent new wife, the young man bowed like a courtier over her jeweled hand.

And Mrs. Grayling could not repress a glance of admiration, as her eyes rested upon his manly form.

But that expression gave way to one of bitter envy as, a moment later, she saw him offer his arm to Grace, and saunter away amid the thronging crowd. It was a notable couple; and so many at the Grange on that memorable night thought and said.

As Thorle with his lovely partner was promenading the length of the large, old-fashioned parlor, he almost halted, as all at once, he came face to face with Abner Denby.

That young fellow, so far as attire was concerned, was almost if not quite the peer of Thorle Manton; and the blushing girl who hung fastidiously upon his arm, rivaled Grace Grayling in beauty.

That girl was Clara Dean, and the dark-eyed, red-cheeked maiden never shone so resplendently.

Young Manton passed on with a haughty air, noticing neither Clara nor her escort. But when he was beyond ear-shot he whispered:

"Do you know that fellow—that white-faced young gentleman, Miss Grayling?"

"Know him?—yes, indeed. And in your ear, Mr. Manton, the right name for him is fellow!"

"Ah! yes, I dare say."

"Why," and she laughed innocently, "that fellow once presumed to make love to me!"

She blushed deeply. She was speaking somewhat impulsively.

"He did, the scoundrel—But his name, Miss Grayling?"

"Abner Denby, lately my father's head-clerk in the business house in New York, now his private secretary. But, Mr. Manton," and still smiling, she pretended to be thinking of something she had forgotten, "it seems to me that I have heard *your* name connected with Denby's?"

Thorle Manton started and frowned.

"Perhaps, Miss Grayling, but that is of the past; let it be buried," he said, rather coldly.

Grace flushed slightly, but in a moment she was happy and cheerful again.

Old Gilbert Grayling was more pompous than

ever that memorable night; but, at the same time, he was notably gracious. The old gentleman had trembled somewhat when Thorle Manton was announced; and when he introduced his distinguished guest to his young wife, he closely and anxiously watched his face.

But Thorle Manton betrayed not the least sign of recognition, of surprise or of embarrassment. From his manner, any one would have been satisfied that he and the lady had never before met.

Had the old gentleman, however, glanced for an instant at the face of his new wife, he would have started at the half-startled, telltale expression resting upon it. As it was, he turned away to think:

"Very strange! Could they, after all, have been together in the road that night? No, I can never believe it. 'Twas a mere coincidence. She was taking a walk, and fled back, fearing my displeasure; that was all."

A pleased, satisfied look came to his face; for he was quite sure that he had solved a problem, which had been annoying him no little of late.

His suspicious, anxious scrutiny was not unnoticed by his wife, who, with a half-defiant toss of her head, was soon as stately and as dignified as ever.

The merry night deepened; the royal banquet was served, and then gay dancers whirled in the giddy mazes.

Thorle Manton had for his partner Grace Grayling. In fact, much to the disgust of the village beaux and country swains, he had monopolized the maiden thus far, and Grace seemed in no wise opposed to that appropriation.

Young Manton, for the second time, frowned this evening, as in the dance he saw *vis-a-vis* to himself and partner Abner Denby and Clara Dean.

Mr. Grayling looked on the inspiring scene with condescending eyes; but gradually a cold, business-like expression crept over his face. Then he turned to his wife, who stood by his side, erect and haughty, and whispered:

"'Tis nearly midnight, my dear; and yet I have not had a chance to speak to Mr. Manton."

"Mr. Manton!" her cheeks growing a trifle whiter than usual. "And what do you wish to speak to him about, Gilbert?"

"On a little matter of business, Cynthia; you know I am desirous of purchasing the Lodge estate, and adding it—"

"Oh, is that all?" she interrupted, with a relieved look.

"Yes. I wish to have a private conference with him on the subject. But there is no fit room for it, except our chamber. Every other place is—"

"Then go there, of course."

"Yes; and will you kindly order your maid to carry wine, water and glasses there, my love?"

Mrs. Grayling started, a bright, gleaming fire glinted in her eyes; then an expression like iron spread over her face.

"Certainly, Gilbert," and turning to her maid, who, stern and stiff, stood behind her, she whispered a few words hastily in her ear.

Florine Flavelle was a cold-hearted, stoical woman. But a shiver shook her frame now. However, glancing significantly at her mistress, she bowed low, and glided from the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SACKCLOTH BEQUESTS.

In a few minutes after Florine had left to carry out her orders, Mrs. Grayling suddenly drew her husband down and whispered in his ear:

"I'll go to my chamber, for a moment, my dear Gilbert. As long as a stranger is to be admitted to it, I would be certain that it is tidy. I'll go and superintend Florine. Do not take your company there until I have returned."

Without waiting for a reply, she left the room unperceived—at least, unnoticed—by any of the company.

"That is clever in her," muttered the old man, in a gratified tone. "She is more like her old self before I married her. Perhaps, after all I have erred—have misjudged her. Ha!" and he cast his eyes over the dancers. "Mr. Manton and Grace have disappeared. 'Pon my soul, I believe it is a love-matter between them. Well, well, if Thorle Manton is indeed rich I shall not say nay."

He turned to chat for awhile with Dr. Goodspeed, who at that moment was passing.

Fifteen minutes before this, Thorle Manton

had whispered something to his lovely partner; and the two withdrew from the dance.

"Is the conservatory still kept up in the old mansion, Miss Grayling?" he asked, as they slowly left the room for a promenade through the house.

"Oh, yes! Papa takes wonderful pride in it, too."

"Ah! Then of all things I would like to have a look in it, just once more," said Thorle, earnestly, the faintest trace of a tremor showing in his tones. "It has been many years, you know, since I was here."

A half-troubled look gloomed the fair young face of the girl; but, banishing it at once, she said, very innocently:

"Then let us, by all means go there. I am tired of this crowd, anyway."

"With all my heart!"

The two passed on, entered the long passage that led to the rear and soon reached the conservatory.

The place was illumined by a dim light which but faintly revealed objects around.

The couple passed inside, and sauntered slowly to the further end. Here they paused in the dense shadows.

Not a word had been spoken by either since they entered.

A queer sensation stole into the maiden's bosom. Then her cheeks flushed, and her bosom heaved as a startling suggestion came to her mind.

What did Thorle Manton mean? Why was he trembling?

This matter was soon set at rest. For when they paused the young man turned at once toward her—not abruptly—and, gently taking her hand, said:

"I beg you, Miss Grayling, not to be alarmed when I tell you candidly that I have purposefully sought this stolen interview."

Grace was now shaking like a reed before the winter winds. But she only bowed her head upon her bosom, and waited.

"That purpose, my dear Miss Grayling, was to unfold to you something which I can no longer keep from you. Our acquaintance has been brief, but it has brought forth its fruit."

"Oh, Mr. Manton, I—"

"I beg you hear me," he interrupted, ardently. "I am a man who can say much in a few words; that shall be my aim now. Listen, Miss Grayling: More than five years ago I gave my heart to a fair but faithless creature. She—after matters had gone very far—flung me off and fled with another man. Her motive in deserting me was, as I afterward learned, because at that time I was embarrassed—was in debt and had no money. That woman still lives. Who she was, or who she may be now, I need not tell you. But I only pity her."

He paused. His strong hand tightened over her slender fingers.

Grace was now trembling so violently that, involuntarily, she leaned against him for support.

"Shall I speak on, Miss Grayling?" asked young Manton, his palm still closing over her fingers.

A deathly silence ensued.

"Yes," at length came, in a whisper, from her tremulous lips.

"I have but little to say," he began in a low, tone. "I am a rich man, Miss Grayling; I am far more; I am an honest man. I love you, Miss Grayling, as I never loved woman before. Can you trust me—will you be my own loving wife?"

A shiver swept like lightning over the maiden's frame. Then she was calm. Then she flung her arms impetuously around his neck, and nestled her head upon his bosom.

He drew her to his heart.

"Grace!"

"Thorle!"

"God be praised!"

"Amen!—Amen!"

The two were plighted; and Thorle Manton's scarred heart was glad and happy again.

For some moments they lingered in the greenhouse. Then they silently moved away to return to the parlor.

But, both suddenly halted and drew back again into the shadows, as, at that instant, a female form darkened the door at the further end, and after a little pause entered the warm, dim-lit conservatory.

She hurried on, and paused near the lamp which was swung from a joist about the center of the long room. The light shone distinctly in her face.

Thorle Manton gave a start; and but for

his restraining whisper Grace would have cried out.

The female was Mrs. Grayling.

She did not see the others.

Hastily plucking a handful of fresh leaves from a plant that stood in one of the earth-filled pots she wheeled and left the conservatory.

"Good heavens! what can this mean?" murmured Grace, in terror. "What is she doing here?"

Thorle Manton's brow grew dark, and darker suspicions filled his bosom. But saying nothing of this to his companion, he whispered:

"Come, Grace, we'll see what plant she has plucked."

They walked on and paused by a flower-pot, just the other side of the lamp. To the pot a label, dangling to a string, was attached.

Young Manton picked it up, and holding it close to the light, read:

"CETRARIA!"

He dropped it with a laugh of relief, and said:

"Tis nothing! This is a cryptogamous lichen, growing in the extreme northern sections of both continents. It is good for coughs and colds, and is known by the common name of Iceland moss. Your good stepmother anticipates its use after this night's dissipation; that's all."

They left the conservatory. But they did not enter the heated, crowded parlor for twenty minutes afterward.

Thorle Manton had stood by the wrong flower box in the conservatory. The dim light had deceived him.

Just about the time he and Grace strolled back into the parlor, Mrs. Grayling re-entered likewise.

Florine Flavelle was not to be seen.

The young wife's face was deadly pale; but neither Thorle nor Grace noticed it. The young man's suddenly-formed suspicions had vanished.

A few moments later, Mr. Grayling approached him very condescendingly, and said something to him. Thorle bowed in acquiescence, and excusing himself to Grace, accompanied his host from the parlor.

They soon reached the elegant bedroom of the lady of the mansion—Mr. Grayling offering suitable apologies for retiring to such an apartment—and the gentlemen seated themselves.

Upon the table was wine; also glasses and a pitcher filled with water. In the water was a lump of ice.

"Carrying coals to Newcastle!" ejaculated the old gentlemen, glancing at the ice, and then listening to the cold winter wind crooning around the mansion. "But take some wine, my dear Manton."

"Thank you, no; I seldom indulge, Mr. Grayling. As it is, I am already more than heated."

"I'll not urge you, of course, my dear sir. But you will pardon me for drinking alone?"

"Certainly, sir."

The old gentleman helped himself to the wine; and at once entered into conversation.

The reader can infer the subject.

For more than a half-hour they talked, Mr. Grayling, in the meantime, drinking freely of the water.

At last he said, as he saw his guest arise.

"Then you will not part with the Lodge, Mr. Manton?"

"On no consideration, my dear sir," was the reply. "I am rich enough to hold it. I was born there, sir, and the old place has many charms for me."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Grayling, in a tone of disappointment. "But of course it cannot be helped. Allow me, my dear Mr. Manton, to express the hope that, in future, we'll be friends."

"Most sincerely do I echo that hope," said the young man, earnestly.

Thorle then bowed and withdrew.

Mr. Grayling sat for several moments longer. At last he muttered:

"I must go back. Confound this thing, I wish it was over. But," suddenly placing his hand to his head, "I have a strange feeling here! Something like a band around my forehead! By Jove! it increases! I must have air!"

He staggered to his feet; his eyes seemed to start from his head. He swayed to and fro like a drunken man, and, tottering back, fell heavily upon the bed. His face was red, almost to bursting, and his heavy breathing filled the room. But his limbs were lax, and his set.

starting eyes were rapidly covering over with a glassy film.

At that moment the rear door softly opened and Florine Flavelle glared cautiously in. Then sinking to her hands and knees, she crept around the bed, raised herself cautiously and took the half-emptied pitcher from the table.

A moment and she glided through the other door, and entered the gloomy, dim-lit hall that led to the parlor.

As she strode along, she muttered, with a mocking laugh:

"Nothing like making assurance doubly sure!"

When the maid had left the room in which lay the unconscious old man, she dropped something just by the door; but so absorbed was this strange woman that she paid no heed to it.

Yet, no sooner had her footsteps died away in the distance, than a short, shambling form, clad in dull, half-white garb, drew from the shadows, and crept toward the door. Groping around in the darkness for a moment, it soon arose and shuffled away noiselessly down the hall.

And as it went, something like a low laugh broke on the air.

Then it suddenly disappeared as though it had gone through the floor.

Old Gilbert Grayling lay for ten minutes, showing no sign of life save the heavy, stertorous breathing. But suddenly he turned, flung himself to the edge of the bed, and cried:

"Oh God! what is this? Help! help!"

Then clutching the pitcher, he held it to his quivering lips and drank deeply. Placing the vessel upon the table, he once again essayed to stand. But with a deep, gurgling groan, he fell back upon the bed.

A half-hour later, a wild, agonizing scream awoke the echoes, and stilled into an awful silence the happy merry-makers in the mansion. Then again and again arose the cry.

It came from Mrs. Grayling's bed-chamber.

The crowd rushed in that direction. Along with it struggled Dr. Goodspeed and Thorle Manton. Reaching the room, a terrible sight was revealed.

Mrs. Grayling was dashing wildly about the apartment, wringing her hands, tearing her hair, and shrieking as one mad.

Upon the bed, rigid, motionless and awful, lay old Gilbert Grayling. His fallen jaw, sunken cheeks, and staring eyes told the tale.

A moment and Dr. Goodspeed, true to professional instinct, was by the side of the motionless man. One quick glance, and he thrust his hand into the pitcher, to fling water upon the ghastly face.

The pitcher was empty!

"Tis no use!" said the physician, shaking his head, as he slid his finger over the cold wrist.

"Apoplexy! He is dead!"

We draw the curtain.

A week elapsed.

Old Gilbert Grayling had been buried; and a long train of mourners followed his remains to the bleak, snow-covered graveyard upon the Grange demesne. Among others present was handsome, sober-faced Thorle Manton, and on his arm hung poor, grief-stricken Grace Grayling. Dr. Goodspeed served the young widow in a similar manner.

At the expiration of the week mentioned, a search was made at the Grange for a will—Dr. Goodspeed and Abner Denby conducting the search. A Last Will and Testament was soon found. In fact it was in the first receptacle looked into—namely: the desk in the sitting-room.

The paper was brief, but well drawn. It was dated "On board steamer, City of Chester, at sea." It did not bear the names of witnesses; but that it was in Mr. Grayling's writing was easily proved. Dr. Goodspeed and Abner Denby were willing to swear to the fact. At all events, it was admitted to probate without question.

That will provided (first) that Clara Dean should remain in the mansion for one year from date of the old man's decease, free of charges, and her current expenses to be met by the estate. At the end of that time she was to leave, and shift for herself. (Second.) That Grace should live at the Grange and receive the sum of two thousand dollars per annum. (Third.) That the residue of the great estate, both real and personal, should go to her whom, in his old age, the testator had made the second Mrs. Grayling.

He left his wife and Abner Denby his sole executors, without bonds.

Poor Grace bowed her head to this unjust

will, and meekly acquiesced in its provisions; for he who had made that will was, after all, her father.

But—

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TALE OF "DEAD MAN'S DRIFT."

A LONG time has elapsed since the occurrence of the incidents as given in our last chapter.

The snows that covered the bleak hills of northern New York, and the glistening icy coat of mail that spread as far as the eye could see over Lake Ontario, have given place to spraying grass of velvety green, and sheeny waters rippling in the glad sunlight of a summer sky.

The bare-armed trees, that in the dreary winter had flung their spectral branches around Grayling Grange, and in the dense copse of the Lodge estate, were now covered with foliage; the warm suns of June glinted over the land.

In the meantime many events had occurred both at the Grange and at the Lodge—many which we cannot linger to record. Suffice it, that we merely skim the passing current of things.

Grace Grayling's life, humdrum, sad and monotonous, as it had been before her father's sudden death, was even more unhappy and wretched afterward. She and her step-mother—who had succeeded to old Gilbert Grayling's immense estate—seldom met. They avoided one another, and neither made any concealment of the fact, that they felt that, at heart, they were foes.

The lady always took her meals alone, in the privacy of her chamber, attended by her taciturn French maid.

Grace, too, had but little to say to Clara Dean, who, since the reading of the will, had been open and bitter in her hostility. The two maidens no longer jointly occupied the same room. Grace could not further brook such intimacy, and had so informed Clara.

The only gleams of sunshine that came to gladden the life of the disinherited daughter, were her interviews with Thorle Manton. These were of frequent occurrence, and were tender and ardent.

The engagement between the two young people was not a secret; it had been known a week after Mr. Grayling's death. The young widow had interposed no authority, no objection, even if she possessed any in the premises. She only smiled scornfully, shrugged her shoulders, and in her wicked heart wished Thorle Manton joy with his wife-to-be, and her two thousand dollars a year!

Mrs. Grayling and Abner Denby managed the affairs of the estate; they managed it, too, to suit themselves. The two were frequently together; and more than once stormy scenes transpired between them—those scenes always ending by the lady humbling herself, and giving a check for a large amount to the "executor."

Abner Denby knew a secret connected with the past life of this haughty woman, and to keep that secret she paid Abner Denby his price!

There were frequent interviews, too, between this deep, designing man and the equally deep and designing Clara Dean. It was plain that they thought a great deal of one another—they were engaged.

Clara, on learning—by the provisions of the will—that she was to be set adrift, and turned out of the Grange after a certain specified time, had grown more bitter, morose and sarcastic than ever. She hated every one in the old mansion—even Abner Denby, despite the relation in which she stood to him.

Affairs at the Lodge moved on smoothly. Thorle and Margoun lived happily together—the former spending much of his time with the fair-haired, sad-faced Grace, whom he loved all the more when he learned that she had been virtually "cut off with a shilling."

Oftentimes, when the young man was alone, his thoughts would run in language like this:

"There's something dark, mysterious, suspicious about that matter; but I am half-glad that my darling Grace has little or nothing, for now she will know that my love for her is pure and disinterested. Yes, I am only glad, now, that I did not trouble her old father concerning his legal ownership of the Grange, for, upon my soul, I fancy that, despite the present prospects of Cynthia Summers, I will yet own the Grange! As for that wicked woman, although the two months she asked have long gone by, I'll let her secret, her dark and damning perjury lie forever dead!"

It was the close of a bright and beautiful day in June. The warm sun was sinking lazily toward the west, as if it fain would linger longer to gladden the flowery meads; and gentle breezes were fanning the stretching lake, over whose bosom white-winged crafts were gliding away, and black-smoked steamers were plowing their course to distant havens beyond.

Upon a rocky eminence by the borders of the lake sat Thorle Manton and Grace Grayling. They were seated, close together, upon a soft carriage-rope, for they had ridden as far toward the spot as they could in the young man's elegant drag. The vehicle, in charge of Aleck, was some distance back in the woods.

At the foot of the cliff stretched a long, broad and level mass of quivering mud, reaching to where the silvery waters of the lake rolled gently in. And even under the mild influence of the washing wavelets, this great quagmire trembled and shivered.

A long and earnest conversation had been in progress between the lovers, but for awhile, silence seemed to have settled over them.

"Ah, Thorle, I shudder to think such a thing!" at last said Grace. "The bare idea that she, his wife, could do such a thing, is terrible in itself!"

"Nevertheless, I have grave suspicions, darling," was the reply. "And I have good grounds for those suspicions. Do you recall the incidents of the night of the reception at the Grange?"

"Yes, alas! too well!"

"Then you remember that Mrs. Grayling stole into the conservatory?"

"True; go on, Thorle."

"I then thought that from one of the boxes she had plucked a handful of Iceland moss. But—"

"Yes, Thorle, and of course—"

"I fear that I was mistaken, Grace. I have been in the conservatory since—and that not ten days ago. Next to that box was, and is, another. That other contains a deadly plant called *Digitalis Purpurea*, but commonly known as *Fox-glove*. A strong decoction of the fresh leaves of that plant would kill as certainly as arsenic or strychnine!"

"Oh, Thorle!" and Grace with a shudder hid her face in her hands.

Thorle Manton sat for several moments without speaking, then continued:

"I do not wish to distress you, darling, but in my opinion that matter needs, and should demand, an investigation. At all events, though disdaining to meddle with business not my own, I shall keep my eyes open. Then, too, there is another circumstance which has just come to my mind, though now I remember it with startling distinctness."

He spoke very earnestly, his eyes almost closing as deep thought-lines wrinkled his brow.

Grace looked up hastily.

"What is it, Thorle?"

"This: that night, when I went with your poor father to his bedroom, besides wine and glasses, there was a pitcher of water on the table. In the water was a lump of ice. A film covered the pitcher. Why was that ice in the pitcher? Your father drank freely of the water, and when I left the room he kept his seat, and his face was very much flushed. But the chief circumstance, Grace, is: the pitcher was empty when it was discovered that your father was dead."

A long silence ensued once more. This time it was broken into by the maiden, who said:

"Your suspicions must be entirely groundless, dear Thorle; for Dr. Goodspeed said that *apoplexy* was the cause of death, and so gave the required certificate."

"Doctors do not know everything," was the reply. "And let me tell you, Grace, that fox-glove, in causing death, simulates, in action, apoplexy. I've been studying the properties of the drug of late; though, truth be told, it is seldom so rapid in its effect—even granting that my suspicions are well-grounded."

"Yes, Thorle; but let us change this terrible subject. 'Tis distressing to me. Now, Thorle," and her face brightened, "the object of this visit here by the lake? You said you had something wonderful to show me."

"'Tis right before you, darling," he answered, with a smile. "Yet I dare say you have never seen it, perhaps never heard of it."

"Before me? Where?" and she glanced around her, in a puzzled manner.

"Yes, right before you."

He pointed to the black mass of quivering mud, that lay between the foot of the cliff and the edge of the lake.

"That! Pshaw, Thorle," and she laughed; "what is there in that?"

"More than you think; *dead men's bones!*"

"Dead men's bones!" echoed Grace, with a shudder.

"Yes, darling, this quag is known as 'Dead Man's Drift,' and the short but sad tale connected with it is as follows: Years ago a schooner was caught in a tempest, such as sometimes howls over these northern lakes. The vessel became unmanageable, and by direction of the captain, as it was *thought*, was beached out yonder. I say *thought*, because not one of the crew of that fated craft lived to tell the tale. Yet, the horror of the scene that then ensued was witnessed by those on the shore."

He paused and glanced over the quivering mass.

"The schooner was beached—yes, and what then?" urged Grace, who was now interested.

"The poor sailors sprung ashore, and endeavored to reach the mainland. Unfortunately they entered the quag. One by one they disappeared; and, owing to the darkness of the night, none knew the fate of the others who had gone first. They were all swallowed up in the horrid depths of that treacherous mud. Under it—how deep no one can tell—their bones rest to-day. So soft is it, Grace, that— Ha! look!"

As he was speaking a slight rustling and a hissing sound were heard at the bottom of the rocks.

A second later a small ground-squirrel ran from the hiding-place below. It was followed by a long and very large snake, known as the water-moccasin. The reptile was chasing the little animal, and, winding its long, sinuous body along, was rapidly gaining upon it.

After darting first to one side and then to the other, in vain efforts to escape, the little squirrel ran right for the black mud-mass. Right behind it glided the snake.

Only a few feet did either progress over the shivering slum, and that was imparted by their own impetus. Suddenly both sunk. Desperately each fought to get back, but all in vain. The squirrel went down, beating the air with its little paws, and the serpent, after a few fearful wriggles, sunk from view. Both were out of sight under the treacherous mire.

Even upon this little scene, this little loss of life in the great economy of nature, Grace Grayling had looked with a fluttering heart. When it was all over she arose hastily and said, with a shudder:

"Come, come, Thorle! 'Tis horrid! I have seen enough. I am sorry that you brought me here!"

"And I, too," said the young man, softly. "You have a tender, womanly heart, Grace. Come."

She took his arm, and the two picked their way through the stones and bushes to the vehicle in waiting for them.

The were soon driving rapidly homeward. The sun had disappeared below the hazy horizon, and the moist summer wind was fanning the air. The highway that led to the Grange was soon reached, and the fleet-footed horses clattered on.

Just before they reached the gate which opened into the Grange lawn, Grace Grayling started suddenly, and, holding her face close to her companion's ear, said, in a low, disturbed tone:

"You remember, Thorle, that many months ago a strange apparition was seen in the old mansion?"

"Yes, darling," was the quick reply, as the young man glanced eagerly at her. "And what of it?"

"I know not what it was, but I do know that I saw it as plainly as I see you now. However, Thorle," and her voice sunk lower than ever, "that strange thing has been seen again—several times."

"Ah! when was it?"

"During the last week; and on every occasion it issued, after midnight, with silent, noiseless step, from the sitting-room, which you know is the center of the old house."

"Yes, but who saw it, darling?"

"Several; first, old Betsy, who has been almost beside herself since; then by John, who had gone in to fix the fire for the night in the kitchen range; finally by Clara Dean and myself. The strangest part of the affair—"

She stopped abruptly, and a suspicious expression rested upon her flushed face.

"Go on, my dear."

"Yes, Thorle; the strangest part of the whole affair is that the thing always is seen coming from the sitting-room. Then it slides along the hall and slowly disappears down the dark passage, which leads to my step-mother's bedroom. More than that; on every occasion on which it has been seen going in that direction

Mrs. Grayling was either closeted with white-faced Abner Denby or with her villainous-looking French maid."

"Ah!" and young Manton gazed for several moments at the maiden.

"Can it be so arranged, Grace," he continued, after a long pause, "that I can stay in the mansion, in the *sitting-room*, for one night?"

"You?" with a start. "Why?"

"To watch, to find out who or what this visitant is," was the rejoinder.

Grace pondered; a bright look, followed instantly by an uneasy, anxious one, flashed over her face.

"But, suppose Mrs. Grayling should see you, Thorle?" she asked.

"Just what I would avoid; hence my question. My word for it, *she is in some way or another connected with this appearance.*"

"What! my step-mother?"

"The same. Now, can I get into the Grange mansion without her knowledge, and without being seen by any one?"

After some moments' reflection Grace answered:

"I have a duplicate to the front door key; perhaps—"

"That will do, if you will trust me with it. If I only knew now when she was to be closeted with Denby or—"

"That will be to-night," interrupted Grace, the bright look returning to her face. "I heard her tell Abner this afternoon to come to her room at nine o'clock this evening."

"Good! I'll watch to-night."

"Then here is the key."

Thorle took and placed it in his pocket.

Aleck had now descended to open the gate. Then the carriage entered the long drive between the spectral poplars.

Ten minutes later, the vehicle shot rapidly back toward the road. Thorle Manton was leaning back in it.

"Push them, Aleck," he said. "I am in a hurry! I have a little business on hand to-night!"

Aleck touched the mettlesome steeds with the whip, and the drag sprung away into the shadows of the copse.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WATCHING.

At a late hour that night Thorle Manton entered the gate that led up to the Grange mansion, and strode hurriedly onward through the ghostly grove. He soon reached the house. Here he paused and glanced around him.

It was now past midnight, and everything was wrapt in silence. Naught could be heard but the crooning sound that came from the grove, and the sighing of the summer night-wind. The mansion was dark and silent—only a very faint light showing through the old-fashioned, narrow-sashed transom window over the front door.

"I must be on my guard," muttered the young man. "Grace alone knows of my clandestine visit here. If I am seen by any one else, this adventure will result in disastrous failure. Yet if not seen, I feel that it will eventuate in something decisive. I must be cautious."

He glanced once again keenly about him, and crept around the mansion. He passed by the conservatory, then to the extreme rear of the old pile, and at last reappeared where first he had paused, by the front door of the mansion.

"All is quiet! the coast is clear, and, come what will, I'll enter," he said, as he stole toward the great walnut doors. "If I encounter this ghost, and it turns out to be something in the shape of flesh and blood—as I suspect—why, I am prepared!"

He was now on the low red stone steps by the door. Stooping, he tried the bolt. The door was locked. Gently inserting the key, he turned it slowly back. The bolt glided from the catch, without awaking the faintest echo.

"So far so good," thought Thorle, as, softly pushing open the door, he entered and stood in the wide, shadow-haunted hall.

A low light was burning in the lamp which hung in the vestibule.

Thorle Manton's heart beat rapidly as he closed the door and removed his boots. Then he turned toward the door which opened into the great gloomy sitting-room.

But he suddenly checked himself and drew back, as under the door he saw a faint line of light distinctly showing.

"Foiled in the beginning! The room is oc-

cupied! And now, by Jove, what shall I— Ha! what—

He crouched to the floor, scarcely breathing. The door of the sitting-room moved noiselessly on its hinges, and a short, shuffling figure, clad from head to toe in dull, spectral white, issued from the apartment, and slid with echoless step across the hall. It passed on, and was soon lost in the darkness of the long passage. That passage led to Mrs. Grayling's bedroom.

Scarcely crediting his senses, the young man slowly arose from his crouching posture, and glanced down the gloomy corridor, at the same time thrusting his hand in his bosom until it rested on the butt of a pistol.

"What shall I do?" he asked himself. "Pursue and shoot? No; I would not arouse the household; I'll wait and watch. And where better than that room whence this nightwalker came?"

He glided across the hallway and entered the sitting-room. Upon the table in the apartment a small dark-lantern was flinging its beams around. But the floor, under the table, was in shadow.

Young Manton took a hasty view of surroundings and crept under the table, determined at all hazards to await what was sure to follow his strange adventure.

But his patience was sorely taxed, for more than an hour passed, and still nothing had occurred to break the monotony of the situation. Despite his every effort to the contrary, the young man now and then caught himself napping.

But at last the opening and shutting of a distant door aroused him, and in a moment he was wide awake. He remained quiet, however, in his hiding-place, and in feverish anxiety awaited what was to follow.

In a few moments he heard the sound of voices right by the sitting-room door, but in the hall. He knew those voices! and he almost sprang from under the table as he listened to the following:

"We can do as we please, Cynthia," said a harsh voice. "You know we are not under bonds! Besides your great fortune you've managed to cut a slice from—"

"True enough, Abner!" with a laugh interrupting him. "And there's small chance of being detected. But I must join Florine; I am sleepy."

"But, Cynthia," in a cold, business tone, "please don't forget that I'll soon call upon you again for my little *divvy*—for keeping my mouth—"

"You are an insatiable leech, Abner Denby!" was the sharp interruption.

A low, mocking laugh followed this; then steps going in different directions were heard. Then all was still.

"The miserable wretches!" hissed Thorle Manton. "But the reckoning day will come, *shall* come. Now, however—"

He suddenly checked himself, and his heart beat rapidly, as the door moved softly open, then closed, and the same sheeted form stole into the room. It shuffled across the floor, and took the dark-lantern from the table.

The figure moved to a tall bookcase by the further wall, rolled the case back and paused before a high section of walnut wainscoting which was set in the wall. A moment, and under a quick, sudden pressure, the section swung back. By the light from the lantern, which the mysterious visitor carried, a double wall was revealed. Between the walls a narrow staircase pushed its way upward.

The ghostly reality was about to enter the hidden passage; but Thorle Manton was behind it.

An instant and a muscular hand grasped the form, and a pistol-barrel was placed against it, as the young man hissed in a low, menacing whisper:

"Hold! I have you now! Breathe a single word above a whisper, and by heavens, I'll spatter these walls with your brains!"

The man—for such it was—struggled madly to free himself, but he was in the hands of a giant. Slowly he turned, ceasing his struggles, and gazed through two openings in the sheet at the young man. With a violent start, and a low, irrepressible cry, he said:

"You, you, Master Thorle! The Lord be thanked!" and as the words came forth almost vehemently, the sheet was hurled aside.

Thorle gave one glance, and cried:

"You! you! my old friend!"

"Yes, Master Thorle; and I would talk with you! I have news!—ay! I have the damning evidence!"

It was nearly dawn when Thorle Manton softly left the Grange mansion and hurried down the shadowy grove to the highway.

"Wonders will never cease!" he muttered, as he plunged into the copse and bent his way toward the distant Lodge. "But the beginning of the end is here!"

At eight o'clock the following morning, Thorle Manton, in company with Margoun, drove away from the Lodge in the drag. An hour and a half later, they stopped at the dreary station of Wyndham, on the railroad.

Thorle Manton carried with him a small parcel, securely wrapped. This package he sent away by express.

That morning at quite an early hour, Grace Grayling received and read with much surprise the following brief note:

"MY DARLING ONE:

"I watched last night at the Grange. I made a trifling discovery, which may lead to astonishing developments. But keep this to yourself until I see you. On no account seek me. Only be satisfied that I am working. Be particular with this note; you had better destroy it. Till we meet, know, as ever, that I am, Your devoted, THORLE."

With wonder Grace turned away and hastily sought her room.

But she did not destroy the note. She only thrust it in her bosom.

A week elapsed, and the maiden had heard nothing further from the young man. The time had passed wearily and feverishly to her. But late in the afternoon of the day which closed the week, Aleck appeared again at the Grange.

He brought another note to Grace.

She clutched it eagerly, and read with dimming eyes and heaving breast:

"MY OWN DARLING:

"I will be at the Grange to-night, between eight and ten o'clock. Be neither surprised, nor alarmed, at anything you may witness. Now a request: Have all the servants out of the house, if possible, as soon after nightfall as you can. Also, see that Mrs. Grayling does not leave the house. Of course you cannot prevent her by force from so doing; *but if she goes out be sure you find out where she is.* Till I see you let this suffice. Your devoted

"THORLE."

"P. S. The dawn is breaking, and the bright day is at hand!"

All in a tremor, and fearing what, she did not know, Grace thrust the note toward her pocket, and ran up-stairs to her room.

But the note did not reach her pocket; it fluttered from her hand and settled upon the hall floor.

Five minutes later, Florine Flavelle, tall, hard, and taciturn, passed on her way to her mistress' chamber. She saw the note, picked it up, and flashed her eyes over it.

As though a dagger had pierced her bosom, the French maid staggered back and gasped for breath.

"So! so!" she muttered, cramming the sheet of paper in her pocket, as she quickly rallied. "The farce is ended, and I am out of the 'cast!' Shall I tell madame of this? No! Ay! ay! *my lost vial has something to do with this!*"

She strode on.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DAY BREAKING.

MARGOUN sat alone in the study of the old lodge! The room was in shadow, for the light in the lamp was turned low.

It was past nine o'clock, and Thorle Manton had left for the Grange nearly an hour before. So the East Indian was left alone to his musings.

But, suddenly the door was opened and Aleck entered. He had been to the post-office at Shoreville for the Lodge mail. He brought with him a single letter. It was in a large envelope, bearing what looked like an official seal.

Aleck laid it upon the table and withdrew.

Margoun drew the envelope toward him and raised the light. Then he glanced at the superscription.

A thrill shot through him, and a violent shiver ran over his tall frame.

The envelope bore, in the upper left corner, a crown; under it was this: "OFFICE OF THE BRITISH CONSUL-GENERAL, NEW YORK."

The address was as follows:

"TO PR. MARGOUN NENA-VASHTI,

"Care of Thorle Manton, Esq.,

"Shoreville P. O., New York."

The East Indian tore open the envelope with greedy fingers. Two folded sheets dropped out. One was tied around with a blue ribbon; the other was loose. Taking up the latter, Margoun read this:

"OFFICE BRITISH CONSUL-GENERAL,

"NEW YORK CITY,

"June 16th, 18—."

"DEAR AND GRACIOUS PR.—I beg leave to inclose herein a document, received more than a month since, at the Consulate, for you. Only to-day have I learned where it could reach you, and I forward at once. Asking that you will honor me by acknowledging receipt, I am, with consideration, etc., etc., THE BRITISH CONSUL-GENERAL."

Margoun laid the sheet aside and picked up the other. With trembling fingers he untied the knotted ribbon. Spreading open the thick sheet, he glanced once at its contents. Then, as a low, glad cry escaped him, he cried:

"At last! at last! But—" his brow clouded, and his eyes dimmed as he continued: "How can I do it! *How can I leave HIM!*"

He thrust the papers into the bosom of his tunic, and flung himself into the chair again, a half-triumphant, half-regretful expression resting upon his dusky face.

At that instant he chanced to look toward the rear window. The sash was flung up to let the passing breezes blow in. Margoun started to his feet and thrust his hand in his bosom.

Standing on the outside, looking in, was a tall, white-faced man, with a pistol in his hand. He was on the point of leveling the weapon; but the Hindoo's sudden movement disconcerted him, for he immediately turned and fled.

Like lightning Margoun darted forward, sprung through the open window, and disappeared.

The dark night wore on.

Thorle Manton still lingered away; nor had Margoun returned. The servants had long since retired, and a brooding silence settled upon the Lodge.

Midnight with its ghostly associations came and passed. Then one o'clock.

A sharp pistol-shot rung out in the darkness near the Lodge. Then all was silent. But a few minutes later, a wild, almost unearthly groan echoed on the air. Then the same dreary silence settled down again, only broken by the sighing of the night-wind through the thick copse.

Early that same evening Mrs. Grayling sat silent and morose in her gaudily-furnished bedroom. A

strange fire was burning in her pale-blue eyes, and a frown brooded over her marble-like brow.

"Strange! Where can Florine be?" she ejaculated, moving restlessly in her chair. "I have hunted her high and low, and have sent messengers for her in every direction, but to no purpose. Her things are here; but—" and her brow wrinkled the more, "I miss more than a thousand dollars from my trunk! Can I suspect Florine, or Abner Denby? However, that sum is a trifle. But where can she be?"

Little did the proud lady dream that that night the stage-coach, on its way to Wyndham Station, had stopped at the Grange, that a woman carrying a small valise had entered it; and that now, as she mused in her chamber, Florine Flavelle was speeding away toward New York city.

Mrs. Grayling arose from her seat and strode up and down the room with restless, uneasy step.

"Florine has been behaving very strangely of late!" she thought, the frown upon her face deepening. "More than once she has been openly defiant, despite my independent position as regards money. Independent!" she echoed, in a startled whisper. "Am I independent? Does not Florine Flavelle hold me in her power? Ay, can she not fling me into a convict's cell? Can she not send me to the gib—"

A deathly pallor spread over her face, and she fell rather than sunk into a chair.

"I feel—yes, in the height of my power—I feel that clouds are hovering about me, and that vials of wrath will soon be—"

Again she tottered to her feet and promenaded the room.

So absorbed was she that she heeded not the rattle of carriage-wheels in the lawn before the house, heeded not the loud, quick rap on the brass knocker of the door, nor the subdued sound of voices in the hall, mingled with the confused tramping as of several men.

Mrs. Grayling's keen senses were all concentrated in other directions—upon her own dark, distracted thoughts.

Up and down her room she continued to stride. But at last she suddenly halted and clutched at the nearest chair for support.

A low, faint rap, as though struck by a timorous hand, had fallen upon her chamber door.

"Come in," she quickly responded, glancing at the door, expecting to see Florine Flavelle enter. But she started back in surprise as she saw old Betsy show her white, scared face.

"Well, old woman, what do you want?" she demanded sharply.

"A gentleman, ma'am, as who—"

"Go on! What about the gentleman? Who is he and what does he want? Out with it!"

"A gentleman wishes to see you for a few moments, ma'am," stammered old Betsy.

"A gentleman! And wishes to see me at this time of night! Why, 'tis nine o'clock! Who is he?"

"Mr. Manton, ma'am—Mr. Thorle Manton."

Mrs. Grayling could not repress the shudder that shook her slender frame so suddenly.

"What does he want?" she gasped, her lips quivering with excitement.

"He wishes to see you a few minutes, ma'am," was the reply; and the old woman turned hastily away.

"What can this mean?" hissed the lady, her eyes glaring wildly. Bah! I will brave him to his teeth! I care no longer for the secret; I am rich, and it matters not whether I am known as Cynthia Summers, or as the young widow of Grayling Grange!"

And hastily arranging her hair, she left her chamber with a firm, haughty step. She strode directly toward the sitting-room. A moment she paused by the door and listened.

All was still as the grave within.

"Yes! he is alone!" she thought, with a low, derisive laugh, as she turned the knob and entered.

But a low cry of alarm broke from her lips, as she flung a single glance around her. The proud defiant glance faded from her eyes, and she recoiled in ghastly fright.

The room contained the following persons; Thorle Manton, who was standing erect and stern by the table; Dr. Goodspeed, who was seated near by, his kindly face gloomed over with an expression of pain and sorrow; Abner Denby and Clara Dean, who sat close together, their faces filled with fear and wonder, while by the door, through which Mrs. Grayling had just passed, stood two brawny men with bronzed faces, and fixed, business-like aspect.

For a moment, as his gaze fell upon the shrinking woman, Thorle Manton's face softened; but in an instant, as he saw her turn as if she would fly from the room, it grew hard and cold again.

"Lock and guard well that door, officers," he said quietly.

"Officers!" gasped the wretched woman glaring around her.

"Be seated, madam, and calm yourself—if you can," said young Manton, in an icy tone. "You are wanted here on serious business, on a matter of the sternest importance."

He thrust his hand in his bosom.

"What would you, Thorle Manton?" hissed the lady. "How dare you—"

"I have in my possession a certain paper, which was recently secured. It was written by your late husband, Gilbert Grayling. It is his will, written since the date of the instrument by which you secured Gilbert Grayling's immense property."

The poor woman struggled to her feet and exclaimed, as she again sunk into the chair:

"'Tis false! false as perdition! You are hounding me to the death and—"

"I have ample cause to hate you, madam," he cut

in, sternly, though without losing his dignity; "but in this matter my object is not to triumph over a weak, misguided and wicked woman, but to secure justice to others. Ho, there! *Come in, Silas Warren!*" he continued, in a loud voice.

Instantly the door at the further side of the room opened, and Silas Warren, the old body-servant of Gilbert Grayling, who had been missing so long from the Grange, entered.

Every one, including Grace, who had come into the room but a moment before, was astounded.

"Now, Silas, tell your tale briefly," said Thorle.

"Yes, sir," and the old man advanced. "You see, I distrusted from the first glance I got of her, the new mistress of the Grange there; and on the very night of her arrival, I secretly followed her to her bedroom; and listening on the outside of the door, I heard strange whisperings between her and her dark-faced French maid."

He paused.

"The import of those whisperings, Silas?" urged Thorle Manton.

"Deep, implacable hostility to my dear old master!" was the reply. "Menaces against his life!"

"What then?"

"I hastened to his room, where I knew Mr. Grayling was. My object was to put him on his guard, to warn him against his new wife. But he would not listen to me; he struck me down, hurled me from the house, and threatened my life should I ever come back again. But I did come back, and six months ago, from my hiding-place which looks into this very room, I saw my dear old master write the paper which you, Master Thorle, hold in your possession. I also saw him rip open the inner lining of his vest, and place the paper therein. Moreover, I saw Mrs. Grayling that afternoon take a paper from yonder desk."

Again he paused.

"What then, Silas?"

"The day following my poor master's sudden death I stole into his room unobserved, and to my joy found the paper in his vest. I kept it all these months, until this night one week ago, when I gave it to you, Master Thorle."

"By what means did you accomplish all this, my dear man?" asked Thorle, a smile covering his lip.

"Under a spectral disguise—a sheet—and from my knowledge of the secret passages in the old mansion," replied the old man. "I took advantage of an old tale."

Mrs. Grayling started violently; so did Grace, Abner Denby and Clara.

"Now here is the paper," and Thorle Manton drew the document from his pocket, and glanced over its contents. "I see it is dated six months ago, and on the day when the horses ran away with the sleigh. You, Mrs. Grayling, may recall that day."

He shot a significant glance at her.

The white-faced, trembling woman only shuddered, and bent her head upon her wildly-pulsing bosom.

"Now, Mr. Denby and Dr. Goodspeed, I will trouble you to look at this paper," continued Thorle.

The two gentlemen approached and examined the document closely. Abner Denby recoiled, and in an instant his cheeks were ashen.

"Whose writing is that, gentlemen?"

"Gilbert Grayling's," answered Dr. Goodspeed, promptly and emphatically.

"Mr. Grayling's," hesitatingly fell from Abner Denby's bloodless lips, as he retreated to his seat.

"Very good! Dr. Goodspeed, will you kindly scan that paper and tell me what is the substance of its contents?"

The old physician took the paper and read it through. Several times he started; and when at last he had finished it a smile spread over his face—a kindly, satisfied smile.

"I had the privilege of learning the contents of the previous will, under which Mr. Grayling's property was distributed," he said. "This," and his voice trembled, "resembles it in some of its provisions, but differs in *tot* in others. Instead of giving his widow the bulk of his property he gives it to his daughter, Grace, while he stipulates that two thousand dollars *per annum* and the Grange mansion during her natural life be granted Mrs. Grayling. You, Mr. Manton, and," in a choking voice, "and myself, his old and tried friend, are left his executors, without the exaction of securities."

He gave the paper back to Thorle, who hid it in his bosom.

For a moment a deathlike silence pervaded the apartment. It was broken by the miserable woman, who cringed like a guilty thing in her chair.

"Let me go! I am suffocating! Let me go!" she moaned, struggling to her feet.

"Hold! not yet! The sternest business for you—Mrs. Grayling!—is yet to come," and young Manton waved her imperiously to her seat.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DAY AT LAST.

MRS. GRAYLING almost fell from her chair. Her cheeks were livid, and every drop of blood seemed to have left her usually red, proud lips.

"Your husband died suddenly, madam!" ejaculated Thorle, almost fiercely. "Do you know anything of the properties of the *digitalis purpurea* or of the deadly properties of the poison of the *Asiatic cobra*?"

Had a shell exploded at her very feet Mrs. Grayling could not have evinced more horrified terror.

"Oh! God!" she cried, in agony, springing to her feet. "I am dying! I am dying! Let me go! I—"

"Be seated, base woman! This terrible scene must be over; and I will tell the tale: You borrowed a medical work from Dr. Goodspeed here; from it you learned the characteristics of *digitalis*.

On the night of the reception here, last January, you stole into the conservatory and plucked a handful of leaves from a *digitalis* plant. With those leaves you made a powerful decoction, placed it in a pitcher, and cooled it with ice. After this, and after your poor husband was almost in the throes of death, Florine Flavelle, at your bidding, stole into the room, and, from a vial, let fall a drop of a virulent poison into the pitcher. Your husband again drank and died!—The vial containing that poison your maid lost. It was found by old Silas Warren, who likewise secured a vialful of the contents of the pitcher. He gave both to me!"

The young man had spoken rapidly and fiercely; and as he ended, he drew two vials from his pocket, and laid them upon the table. One was a small, gilded, cut-glass vessel, similar to Eastern attar-of-rose bottles.

A shudder ran through the assembly; but in a second every one was struck dumb with horror, as with a wild, despairing shriek, Mrs. Grayling sprang like lightning toward the table, clutched the cut-glass vial, and before she could be prevented, placed it to her lips, and drained it to the bottom.

She reeled back, staggering across the room, and fell to the floor. There was, for a single moment, a horrible quivering of the limbs; then all was still.

Dr. Goodspeed rushed to her side. One grasp of the pulseless hand, one glance at the still silent, siren-like face, and he muttered in a whisper:

"Dead!"

"Go, my men!" said Thorle Manton, in a sepulchral tone to the officers; "you are not wanted. Great God!" he continued, as he turned away, "and has it all ended thus?"

There was a tear in his manly eyes, and a quivering about his lips, as he uttered the words.

The hour of midnight had fallen over the death-stricken mansion of Grayling Grange. All was silent within.

The body of the poor woman been decently arranged in the room where she had fallen. Thorle Manton and Dr. Goodspeed had attended to that; and both had remained until nearly daybreak.

Just after they had taken their departure, and the old mansion was silent again, two dim forms stole down the broad stairway into the dark hall. They paused and listened. No sound came to their ears.

"Come, Clara," whispered one of them; "this house is no place for us! We'll get her diamonds and money, and flee to New York, where we will live in plenty and ease. Come, I know the way."

"Lead on, Abner," was the reply.

They stole cautiously down the gloomy passageway toward the bedroom to which we have so frequently referred.

Half an hour later, a man and a woman crept from the great doors of the mansion and hurried away through the grove toward the distant road—Abner Denby and Clara Dean.

"Come, we must hurry!" said the fellow, striding on. "We'll push straight for the lake, find a boat somewhere, and row to Shoreville. The water will be smooth to night; and we will throw any one, who may follow us, off the track."

They crossed the highway, and entered a narrow lane that ran by the Lodge estate, directly toward the neighboring lake.

On and on they pushed. At last they could hear the monotonous, melancholy washing of the waters; then they scrambled up the same rocky cliff upon which, one week before, Thorle Manton had told to Grace Grayling the terrible tale of the black quagmire—Dead-Man's Drift.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Denby, exultantly. "At our feet is the white beach, and yonder is the lake. Take my arm and come. Take a long leap!" he continued, with an exhilarating laugh.

They took the leap—their last!

They struck full on the treacherous, shivering mire, which looked white under the sheeny moonlight; and in an instant, without a word or cry, or groan, they shot down out of sight to their everlasting doom—the quivering mud closed over them forever.

When Thorle Manton reached the Lodge that night he searched for his faithful friend high and low. But the Hindoo was not to be found. He certainly was not in the mansion.

Wearied and worn out, the young man flung himself on the bed and soon fell into a restless, uneasy slumber.

At an early hour he awoke, and immediately repaired to the room which had been allotted to the East Indian. But Margoun was not there.

Wondering what this could all mean, Thorle dressed himself and strolled from the house to catch the cool breeze of the morning.

But as the young man reached the gate that led into the copse, he reeled back, gasped, and trembled as though he had seen a spirit.

Just inside the gate, lying flat upon the back, was the body of a dead man.

It was Moses Denby.

Driven deep into his breast was Margoun's deadly krees.

Several months passed, and the frosty nights and the golden leaves of autumn were at hand.

Thorle Manton and Grace Grayling were now man and wife, and they lived in the grand old Grange mansion, where, once again, Silas Warren was installed as head servant.

One evening Thorle and his young wife were seated in the old sitting-room. He had been talking a long time, and she had been listening with eager interest.

"Why, darling," she said in wonder, "that sounds like romance!"

"Yet, my dear, that is the way in which, in one week, I got such fabulous wealth," he said, smiling. "And that was the way in which I saved Margoun's life. I fought the half-clad natives at fearful odds. But I was desperate then!" and he frowned.

"Now one thing more, darling Thorle," and as a shadow passed over her face, Grace drew nearer to her husband. "Tell me the link between you and her who of late was the wife of my poor father."

"Listen," and his brow clouded. "That woman was once my wife for one hour, and—don't interrupt me—the subject is distasteful, and I would banish it forever. She was my wife for one hour. But while I was awaiting her, to go to the depot, she eloped with a Prussian officer who was traveling in this country, and who was reputed to be rich. Be it said, that as soon as we were married, I had told her—what I had taken no pains to conceal from her—that I was peculiarly embarrassed, but that my prospects were good. However, she eloped with this officer. He was afterward killed at the bloody field of Gravelotte. As soon as I learned beyond a doubt that she had deserted me, I readily secured a divorce without any publicity. But that woman died, thinking that, in the eyes of God and man, she was my wife! She is the same about whom I once chastised Abner Denby; and here is her picture, which I have so long kept—but to be now destroyed. Look upon it, Grace; you will recognize it," and he drew from his bosom a miniature case and held it to her.

"Cynthia Summers was her name," he continued, as he saw Grace gaze in wonder at the picture.

"Cynthia Summers!" echoed the young wife.

"Yes, Abner Denby once loved her. By the way, darling, I saw in the paper to-day, that there had been a fire in New York, and old Mrs. Denby was—"

Before he could speak further, our old acquaintance, John, the driver, entered. He had just returned from the village post-office. He handed a large weighty envelope to Thorle, and withdrew.

The envelope bore several foreign stamps, and was directed to Thorle in a handwriting that the young man knew at a glance.

Eagerly he clutched the envelope, tore it open, and took out two sheets of paper.

"From him! from him! At last! at last!" he murmured.

Then smoothing out the first folded paper, he read:

"CALCUTTA, August 6th, 1873.

"DEAR, DEAR SAHIB:—You do not know how it wrung my heart to go away without bidding you farewell; but I could not do that! It would have killed me! But I love you still, Sahib, and should we never meet again, I pray that the Christian's God will ever bless you and make you happy. Long before this, I think, you have found my krees. If so, keep it as a souvenir of him who used it in your defense, of him who loved you so much, and who would have died for you. I inclose a paper which I received the night of my departure from the Lodge. Read it, and know why I left you. May the Christian's God always bless you!"

"Faithful to the end,

"MARGOUN NENA VASHTI,

"Prince of Conduranga."

"Prince!" ejaculated Thorle in wonder and amazement, picking up the other paper and opening it, he read it through. His fingers trembled and the sheet slid from them.

"Margoun was a native prince, my darling," he said, sinking into a chair. "He revolted against what he considered a usurpation of his rights. But in view of his high caste, and great influence, he has been unconditionally restored to his full rank and to his great estates! Wonder upon wonder!"

Months upon months rolled by; the Centennial year of American Independence dawned upon the world.

One day Thorle Manton and his young wife were strolling through the grand exhibition grounds. Behind them came a nurse, rolling in a baby-carriage a youngster, who was just old enough to look at you, and dimple his face with smiles when you called him *Margoun*.

As the happy husband and party were passing the house occupied in the "grounds" by the English Commission, Thorle started violently as he saw, coming from the building, a tall, dusky-faced man in rich oriental garb. At his heels trod two attendants attired almost as gorgeously as himself, who were evidently their master.

The swarthy foreigner drew nearer. His eyes suddenly fell upon Manton. He sprang forward.

"SAHIB!"

"MARGOUN!" and the two strong men were locked in a loving embrace.

The two friends had met again.

But no word was spoken of the poor, misguided one, over whose grave in the distant cemetery of Grayling Grange the summer grass had long been springing—no word was said of her, who in her brief young life had been: "The Loved of Many Men!"

THE END.

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